image

62 JUN DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN®

Capullo '97

McFARLANE C.W. B:.

THE MAN'S GURGLING ON HIS OWN **BLOOD.** HIS SCREAMS ARE BARELY AUDIBLE.

THERE WAS NO DENYING HIS VALUE AS AN EXPERT ON RUSSIAN POLITICAL AND CONSUMER PREFERENCES. AS A WELL-PLACED INSIDER BEHIND THE OLD IRON CURTAIN, HE HAD NETWORKS CONNECTING HIM TO ALL AREAS OF INTEREST.

THE C.I.A. WAS ONE OF **MANY** CLIENTS. RECENTLY, THOUGH, VICTOR'S **CREDIBILITY** HAD COME INTO QUESTION. CERTAIN SOUTH AMERICANS HAD BEEN GETTING TOO COZY.

SO, VICTOR SIMPLY DISTANCED HIMSELF FROM PEOPLE WHO WERE ACCUSTOMED TO RELYING ON HIM. BAD MOVE.

HE WAS NOW **UNNECESSARY...** EVEN A **LIABILITY.**

HIS BODY WILL NEVER BE FOUND.

HE WILL BE EXPLAINED AWAY AS A DEEP-COVER MOLE WHO FEARED **DETECTION** AND WAS SPIRITED HOME.

CRUSHED NOW AGAINST CHAIN LINK FENCE, HE'S GIVEN UP ALL HOPE OF ESCAPE. AS HIS TWO BURLY ASSAILANTS LOOM, **VICTOR KOSLOV** PRAYS SILENTLY IN HIS NATIVE TONGUE.

IN YEARS PAST, WHILE WORKING IN THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS' U.S. MISSION, VICTOR REPORTED DIRECTLY TO THE KREMLIN. THEN, SEDUCED BY CAPITALISM, HE **DEFECTED.**

SUCH IS THE FATE OF THOSE WHO CROSS THIS MAN: **JASON WYNN,** HEAD OF AMERICA'S OFFICIALLY NON-EXISTANT, MOST POWERFUL INTERNATIONAL INTELLIGENCE BUREAU: THE **UNITED STATES SECURITY GROUP.**

HRK!

TIME TO RISE AND SHINE, JASON.

OPEN THOSE EYES UP, NICE AND WIDE.

WHAT'S THE MATTER, TOUGH GUY, SURELY IT CAN'T BE THAT YOU'RE AFRAID, NOT YOU. I THOUGHT YOU WERE BEYOND THAT.

NOTHING GETS TO YOU. THAT'S WHAT YOU KEPT TELLING US. YOU'RE ALWAYS IN CONTROL.

WELL, YOU'RE WRONG. I'M GETTING TO YOU AND NOTHING CAN STOP THAT.

WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?!

WHAT'S THE **MATTER,** JASON? DON'T RECOGNIZE YOUR OWN HANDI-WORK?

OR ARE YOUR HANDS SO CLEAN YOU'VE NEVER SEEN THE RESULTS OF YOUR KILL ORDERS? THAT'S WHY YOU NEEDED **US**-- YOUR **ELITE ASSASSINS.** WE PROVIDED THE BUFFER OF **DENIABILITY** YOU NEEDED AS YOU PLAYED YOUR SECRET **WAR GAMES.**

YOU WANT TO KNOW THE STRANGE THING? FOR THE MOST PART, I DIDN'T EVEN **MIND.**

BUT THEN YOU HAD TO GET **GREEDY.** NEEDED TO HAVE POWER OVER EVERYTHING AND EVERY**ONE.**

WHAT DO **YOU** CARE ABOUT THE PAIN YOU CAUSED THEIR FAMILIES.

SO ***THAT'S*** IT?! YOU'RE SOME KIND OF TRAITOR. SEEKING ***REVENGE,*** hm? HOW ***PATHETIC.***

THOSE OF US THAT GOT IN YOUR WAY JUST BECAME **EXPENDABLE,** ISN'T THAT RIGHT?

ISN'T THAT RIGHT?!

THE MEN I TRAINED WOULD RATHER ***DIE*** THAN COMMIT TREASON.

NOT IF YOU KILL THEM FIRST!

THEN THEY CAN'T COME BACK TO HAUNT YOU. WELL, GUESS WHAT? YOU MISCALCULATED. I'M BACK. AND THOUGH I'VE LOST EVERYTHING, I STILL KNOW WHAT'S IMPORTANT... REVENGE! THAT OPINION IS ALL YOU LEFT ME WITH.

SEE YOU IN HELL, JASON.

THEN FITZGERALD AND HIS WIFE DIE TOO.

SPAWN STARES INTO WYNN'S BLACK EYES. HE KNOWS THIS MAN DOES NOT BLUFF. SO, SLOWLY, HE LOWERS HIS GUN.

THE EXECUTIVE DISCRETIONARY DIRECTIVE. YOU REMEMBER WHAT THAT MEANS?

...THAT NO MATTER HOW I DIE, ORDERS ARE PUT INTO EFFECT "PROTECTING" THE AGENCY FROM THOSE I HAVE DEEMED *DANGER-OUS*.

THAT WOULD INCLUDE ***YOU***. BUT SINCE I DON'T KNOW YOUR ***IDENTITY***, I HAD TO FIND ***OTHER*** NAMES FOR MY ENEMIES LIST.

ALONG WITH THEIR DAUGHTER.

THE WHOLE FAMILY BECOMES A SMEAR ON THE *WALL* IF YOU INSIST ON INDULGING YOUR REVENGE.

GHAKH

IF *I* DIE, *THEY* DIE. YOUR CHOICE.

YOUR FONDNESS FOR TERRY AND HIS FAMILY IS QUITE OBVIOUS. UNFORTUNATELY, THEY'RE NOW INCLUDED IN THE DIRECTIVE.

NEARLY TWO MINUTES PASS AS WYNN STRUGGLES TO BREATHE.

YOU THINK YOU'VE WON?! THEN LISTEN CLOSE.

YOU STAY **AWAY** FROM THAT FAMILY. YOU SO MUCH AS **SNEEZE** IN THEIR DIRECTION AND I'LL GUT YOU WITHIN THE **HOUR**. DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR?

NOTHING CAN SAVE YOU FROM ME. AND JUST TO PROVE MY POINT? TOMORROW AT MIDNIGHT I'LL BE IN YOUR OFFICE. AND NO AMOUNT OF SURVEILLANCE, SECURITY OR ARMED GUARDS IS GOING TO **STOP** ME.

SO YOU LET THEM ALL KNOW. **BRING** THEM ALL TO THE PARTY BECAUSE I WANT YOU TO FULLY UNDERSTAND THAT **ANY** TIME, **ANYWHERE,** **I CAN GET TO YOU.** AND THAT IF YOU PISS ME OFF YOU CAN DIE IN A **HEARTBEAT.**

WE'LL K-**KILL** YOU...

NO, YOU WON'T.

CRASH!

BECAUSE YOU CAN'T KILL WHAT'S ALREADY **DEAD!**

...AND THEN SOPHIE JUST WENT *NUTS*, MAKING FACES AT EVERYONE AT THE BURGER KING.

THANK GOD SHE NAPPED AFTER THAT.

WE KNOW THE FEELING. WHEN WE LEAVE A RESTAURANT, YOU'D SWEAR TEN PIGS ATE AT OUR TABLE.

TERRY SOMETIMES CRAWLS UNDER THE TABLE TO PICK UP THE FOOD DEBRIS.

YOU SHOULD SEE THE LOOKS HE GETS FROM COUPLES WITHOUT KIDS. I'M SURE THEY DOUBLE UP ON BIRTH CONTROL FOR THE NEXT WEEK.

MOMMA! ME SHOW BED?

SURE, HONEY.

YOU HAVEN'T SEEN SOPHIE'S NEW BUNK BED YET HAVE YOU, WANDA? C'MON.

AS THE FEMALES DISAPPEAR DOWN THE HALL, AN UNEASY SILENCE SETTLES OVER THE LIVING ROOM.

THEN...

WE REALLY APPRECIATE YOU AND JULIE HAVING US OVER FOR DINNER TONIGHT, MITCH.

YES. WELL, um...

WITH ALL THE TENSE TIMES WE'VE HAD LATELY, I KNOW WANDA REALLY NEEDED THIS.

TERRY, ***LISTEN.*** THERE'S SOMETHING YOU SHOULD KNOW.

THE NEIGHBORS ARE GETTING TOGETHER, TRYING TO GET A ***PETITION*** IN PLACE THAT ESSENTIALLY ASKS FOR YOUR FAMILY TO BE ***REMOVED*** FROM THE AREA.

WHAT?!

THEY THINK YOUR LIVING HERE IS PUTTING THEM ALL IN DANGER. YOUR ***SHOOTOUT.**** CYAN'S ***KIDNAPPING.**** AND CONSIDERING THE PEOPLE YOU ***WORK*** FOR, EVERYONE'S WORRIED THAT THESE KINDS OF THINGS WILL JUST CONTINUE TO HAPPEN.

SO HOW BAD IS IT?

PRETTY BAD. MIKE KEENAN HAS EVEN RETAINED A LAWYER. JULIE AND I ARE BEING SHUNNED TOO, BECAUSE WE'RE NOT JOINING IN.

THE GROUNDSWELL IS GROWING. EVERYONE'S SAYING THEY ONLY WANT TO PROTECT THEIR KIDS.

JESUS.

* ISSUE 23.
** ISSUE 59 -- Tom.

1:27 A.M. WEATHER PATTERNS HAVE BEEN CALM ALL DAY, SO AS THE CLOUDS SUDDENLY BEGIN TO **SWIRL**, THERE IS NOTHING THE METEOROLOGISTS CAN ATTRIBUTE IT TO.

GALE FORCE WINDS AND A FIVE DEGREE TEMPERATURE DROP IN LESS THAN A MINUTE. WE HUMANS WILL PERCEIVE NOTHING ELSE RELATING TO WHAT'S ABOUT TO HAPPEN.

TO THOSE BORN IN REALMS **BEYOND** LIFE, THOUGH, WHAT TRANSPIRES NEXT IS **IMPOSSIBLE** TO IGNORE--

--AND POTENTIALLY **CATASTROPHIC.**

HER NAME IS **ANGELA.** SHE'D BEEN IN THE PROCESS OF LEARNING MORE ABOUT HER HEAVENLY ORIGINS.*

THAT WAS BEFORE THE **LIGHT** STRUCK HER, REDUCING HER TO COMPONENT **ATOMS.** IN A HEARTBEAT, THE WAS TRANSPORTED AN UNIMAGINABLE DISTANCE AND ACROSS DIMENSIONS.

*CURSE OF THE SPAWN #10 -- Tom.

EMERGING FROM THE FLAMES UNHARMED, MANIFESTED ANEW AS MYSTICAL ENERGY DANCES SLOWLY AROUND HER GOLDEN BODY, THE HUNTER INSTINCTIVELY READIES HERSELF--

--TIGHTLY CLUTCHING HER BATTLESTAFF AS SHE SURVEYS THE FAMILIAR LANDSCAPE:

BEFORE SHE CAN MOVE, A **SECOND** STREAM OF CRACKLING VITALITY EXPLODES FROM THE SAME RIFT.

EARTH.

SHE SENSES THAT HERS ARE THE ONLY EYES ABLE TO PERCEIVE WHAT IS HAPPENING.

AND THAT THIS SECOND BOLT WASN'T JUST A RANDOM SHOT.

IT HAD A **PURPOSE.** WITH A TARGET **VERY MUCH** IN MIND.

A HEARTBEAT EARLIER...

AS HE FELT HIS COSTUME GROW TAUT, CONSTRICTING HIS NECRO-PLASMIC SKIN, SPAWN CAME ALERT.

HE RECOGNIZED THE SYMBIOTIC COSTUME'S SIGNAL OF **DANGER.**

TOO LATE.

THEN ALL GOES BLACK.

FOR ONE FULL MINUTE HE LIES MOTIONLESS, LIKE SOME DISGARDED RAG DOLL TOSSED ON THE GARBAGE HEAP.

WHAT THE HELL WAS **THAT?!**

THAT WAS A GASP OF SHOCK AS MUCH AS A QUESTION. HE DIDN'T EXPECT AN ANSWER.

BUT NOW HIS CRIMSON CLOAK **CONVULSES**, SNAPPING WILDLY LIKE SOME RABID BEAST HELD BACK ON A TETHER.

IT FEELS THE PRESENCE OF **HEAVEN.**

GET **UP**, SIMMONS.

ANGELA?!

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

I THOUGHT MAYBE YOU COULD TELL **ME.** I WAS HALF A GALAXY AWAY A FEW MINUTES AGO. NOW I'M **HERE.**

IN **YOUR** TERRITORY.

SO YOU THINK **I'VE** SOMEHOW SUMMONED YOU HERE. THAT NOW **I** CONTROL THE COSMOS, AND I JUST HAPPENED TO STAND IN THE WAY OF **MY OWN FIRE-POWER**. GET **REAL**.

YOU'RE THE ANGEL HERE. I'M NOT QUITE **UP** ON ALL THIS HEAVEN AND HELL B.S.

OKAY. I GET THE SARCASM.

I'LL SHARE WHAT I KNOW. BUT FIRST, CALL OFF YOUR CLOAK. MY RIBBONS AREN'T IN THE MOOD.

SO?

...

A ***BREACH*** HAS FORMED WITHIN THE ETERNAL TRIUMVERATE. A CYBERNETIC SOUL-EATER CALLED THE ***ARGUS*** IS THE CATALYST, IN CON-JUNCTION WITH LIMBO.

LOOK. CUT THE BIBLICAL LINGO AND TALK STRAIGHT. I'VE **ALREADY** GOT A HEAD-ACHE.

THE SPIRITUAL GLUE THAT HOLDS THE ***UNIVERSE*** TOGETHER IS COMING LOOSE. ***UNDERSTAND?*** BECAUSE ***I*** SURE DON'T. I JUST THOUGHT THIS LITTLE RENDEZVOUS MIGHT BE ***MORE*** THAN A COINCIDENCE.

OBVIOUSLY, IT ISN'T.

DON'T BE SO COCKY. EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON. FATE DOESN'T DEAL IN ACCIDENTS, SO ACT IGNORANT IF YOU WANT, BUT I'M NOT ABOUT TO...

CONVERSATION IS ABRUPTLY TERMINATED AS LIGHT BATHES THE DUO.

CHAOTICALLY, EVERYTHING STARTS TO UNRAVEL. ***LITERALLY.***

BURNING WHITE HOT, THE LIGHT TAKES FORM BEFORE ***IMPLODING,*** SLAMMING SPAWN WITH ITS SILENT FORCE...

...LEAVING HIM ALONE AGAIN -- WITH NO ANSWERS.

TMP

NAUSEA STAMPEDES THROUGH HIS BODY AS HE STAGGERS UNEASILY INTO THE NIGHT.

THERE'S A RINGING IN HIS EARS, AND SPAWN IS FEELING STRANGE.

WHEN HE WAS ALIVE, HE CALLED IT "BEING DRUNK".

DON'T *GIVE* US THAT CRAP. WE *KNOW* YOU HOLDIN' OUT ON US, MAN!

SEE, JUST LIKE I *THOUGHT*. GOD BLESS FRIDAY AND THEM WELFARE CHECKS.

C'MON, FREDDY, LET'S GO GET US SOME *BEER*.

KINGINGINGING

KLOK!

HEY!!

WELL NOW, WHAT HAVE WE GOT HERE? A LITTLE FAR FROM HARLEM, AREN'T YOU, *HOMEBOY?*

WE DON'T LIKE YOUR KIND STRAYING THIS WAY.

SO I'M GOING TO GIVE YA TO THE COUNT OF TEN TO TAKE YOU AND YOUR FAGGY COSTUME *OUT* OF HERE.

ONE!

TWO OOUKH!

TEN.

YAAA!

YOU WANT A PIECE OF ME, TOO?

GULP!

DIDN'T THINK SO.

YOU ALL RIGHT?

FINE. YES, I'M FINE. THANK YOU, SIR.

YOU KNOW, I'D *HEARD* SOME ABOUT YOU. HOW YOU BEEN HELPIN' SOME OF US HOMELESS. THEY SAY YOU'RE SOME KINDA *HERO*. THAT YOU AREN'T *AFRAID* OF NOTHIN'.

BUT THEY ALSO SAID YOU WERE A *MONSTER* OR SOMETHING. I'M GOING TO TELL THEM THEY WAS *WRONG*.

YOU'RE A *MAN*. A *GOOD* MAN.

SPAWN LISTENS TO HIS RAMBLINGS FOR A WHILE, THEN POLITELY EXCUSES HIMSELF. HE NEEDS TO SIT BEFORE HE COLLAPSES.

...SO AFTER HE WINS 20 GAMES FOR THEM, St. LOUIS SHIPS HIM OFF TO THE PHILLIES.

I THINK THEY GOT RICK WISE IN RETURN.

27 WINS FOR A *LAST PLACE TEAM?!* IT WAS UNREAL. THAT'S WHY STEVE CARLTON WILL *ALWAYS* BE MY IDOL.

THAT'S INTEREST-ING.

*ANY*WAYS, THE VERY NEXT YEAR PHILADEL-PHIA COMES IN LAST PLACE. I MEAN THEY PLAYED LIKE *CRAP*.

BUT GET THIS, HE GOES *27* AND *10*!! CAN YA FRIGGIN' *BELIEVE* IT!

HE WINS THE CY YOUNG BY A UNANIMOUS VOTE. THE WHOLE THING CHANGED MY LIFE.

THAT WAS 1972. AIN'T BEEN ANYONE IN THE NATIONAL LEAGUE WON THAT MANY *SINCE*.

WELL, GUESS THE FIRE'S GOING PRETTY GOOD NOW. CARE FOR A LITTLE NIGHT-CAP?

CHRIST ALMIGHTY. YOUR *FACE!*

IT'S BACK!

TO BE CONTINUED.

image

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SPAWN

Capullo 97

McFarlane

SINCE THE DAY HE FIRST APPEARED IN THE MIDST OF MANHATTAN'S FILTH AND SQUALOR, SPAWN'S STATURE AMONG THE HOMELESS HAS GROWN. FOR THE MOST PART, HE'S ACCEPTED AS THEIR **KING**.

WORD OF HIS CAPABILITIES -- AND OF HIS IN-YOUR-FACE ATTITUDE -- HAS ELEVATED HIM TO NEAR-MYTHIC STATUS. YET, THOSE LIVING IN AND ON THE FRINGE OF THE ALLEYS WISELY **RESPECT** THE REPUTATION OF THE CRIMSON-CLOAKED WARRIOR, GIVING HIS TERRITORY **WIDE BERTH**.

THOUGH HE HAS NOW LIVED AMONG THEM FOR ALMOST A **YEAR**, HE HAS KEPT HIS TRUE ASPECT FROM THEM. "**AL**" IS THE ONLY NAME HE GIVES.

AND HIS **FACE**, SO HORRIBLY SCARRED THAT HUMAN FEATURES WERE BARELY DETECTABLE, WAS NEVER A TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION EITHER.

UNTIL **NOW**

HOLY CRAP.

A-AL--!

JEEZ, MAN! LOOKIT YOU! IS THAT WHAT YOU REALLY LOOK LIKE?

GET OUT OF HERE. LEAVE ME ALONE.

MY GOD!

HE'S RIGHT. GODDAMMIT, MY FACE... IT'S BACK!

ALL THE SCABS HAVE BEEN COVERED WITH FLESH. MY FLESH. I'M A MAN AGAIN.

GOT TO THINK THIS THROUGH. WHAT COULD THIS **MEAN?** IS IT PERMANENT, TEMPORARY. WHAT?

THE BOYS ARE GONNA HAVE A HEART ATTACK WHEN THEY HEAR THIS.

NO.

YOU'LL SAY NOTHING TO THEM. NOT UNTIL...

AW, ***C'MON,*** AL. EVERYONE'D BE SO EXCITED. I MEAN, WE KNOW YOU CAN DO MAGIC AND STUFF...

... BUT FIGURED YOU'D HAVE GIVEN YOURSELF A NEW FACE BY ***NOW*** IF YOU COULD.

THIS IS BIG NEWS.

DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME?!! NO ONE IS TO KNOW ABOUT THIS. NOT UNTIL I'M SURE WHAT EXACTLY THE HELL IS GOING **ON** HERE.

NOW **GO.** BEFORE I LOSE MY **PATIENCE.**

I NEED TIME TO THINK.

YEAH. ***GOTCHA.*** RIGHT. PERFECT. WHAT***EVER*** YOU WANT.

WHAT A TIGHTASS.

NEED TO CHECK SOMETHING.

MY EYES... THEY'RE STILL BLANK.

I **KNEW** THIS WAS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE. THEY LET ME HAVE MY **FACE**, BUT IT'S NOT **REAL**. JUST MY NECROPLASM TAKING ON MY FORMER FEATURES.

AND **WHY?** SO I CAN GO THROUGH **ANOTHER** OF THEIR TORTURES...?

AND I THOUGHT US **HUMANS** COULD BE A SADISTIC LOT. WE DON'T HAVE **ANY**THING OVER HEAVEN AND HELL...

...BECAUSE IT WASN'T AN **ACCIDENT** THAT ANGELA AND I WERE **BOTH** NAILED BY THAT BOLT. *

PROBLEM IS, EXCEPT THAT IT MADE ME FEEL A BIT **NAUSEOUS**, I WOULDN'T EVEN HAVE KNOWN.

SOMEONE'S TRYING TO SEND A **MESSAGE**.

*LAST ISSUE -- Tom.

BUT I'M **NOT** GOING TO WASTE TIME TRYING TO FIGURE OUT THE RULES OF **ARMAGEDDON**. NOT WHEN I'VE GOT THE CHANCE TO BE **WHOLE** AGAIN.

I'VE JUMPED THROUGH ENOUGH HOOPS, SO THEY'RE TRYING TO **GOAD** ME. IT'S NOT GOING TO **WORK**. I'VE GOT A PIECE OF MY **LIFE** BACK. I'LL **TAKE** THAT.

IT'S NOW JUST A MATTER OF GETTING **HEALTHY** SO I CAN **USE** IT.

*THEY ALREADY **KNEW** THAT-- **THE WORMS**. HEEDING AN ALERT GIVEN OFF BY SPAWN'S LIVING TISSUE, THE **FLOOD** OF BILATERAL INVERTEBRATES POURED FROM EVERY CRACK AND CREVICE HIDDEN WITHIN NIGHT'S BLEAK SHADOWS...*

*...**OOZING** SLOWLY UP THEIR MASTER'S BODY UNTIL IT'S **BLANKETED**.*

*THESE BURROWING, SLITHERING CREATURES ARE HELL'S BACK-ALLEY ENTRANCE TO EARTH. THEY DRAW UPON THE **SINS** OF MAN AND **FEED** THIS ENERGY TO THE DEMONIC COSTUME AND ITS HOST.*

*THE MAN ONCE KNOWN AS AL SIMMONS **WELCOMES** ALL OF IT.*

I'VE ALREADY CONTACTED THE PROPER PEOPLE AT DELTA BASE. THEY'LL BE REINFORCING THE PRIMARY AIR STRIKE TEAM.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE?

GOOD. WE DON'T WANT TO OVER-EXCITE TOO MANY OF THE SECOND-SHIFT DESK JOCKEYS.

PRECISELY. COMMANDER HULL WILL FILL YOU IN ON THE REST.

SIR. I'VE DOUBLED THE STRENGTH OF THE INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR PERIMETER WATCHES.

WELL, SIR, SINCE IT WAS YOU YOURSELF WHO RECEIVED THE TERRORIST THREAT, WE'VE GOTTEN ABSOLUTE COOPERATION. A COMPLETE LOCKDOWN OF THE BUILDING WILL OCCUR AT TEN O'CLOCK TONIGHT.

ONLY SECURITY OFFICIALS KNOW ABOUT IT, THOUGH, AS PER YOUR INSTRUCTIONS.

POLICE, F.B.I., AND S.W.A.T. ARE ALL POSITIONED TO DEPLOY AS NEEDED.

AND SURVEILLANCE EQUIPMENT?

ADDITIONAL UNITS ARE IN PLACE, Mr. WYNN. THIS TERRORIST, WHO-EVER IT IS, CAN'T BE STUPID ENOUGH TO THINK HE'S ACTUALLY GOING TO PENETRATE THIS BUILDING.

INSANITY *IS* HELPFUL IN GUERILLA WARFARE, COMMANDER.

I'M SURE IT'S JUST ANOTHER IDLE THREAT FROM SOME MILITIA GROUP LOOKING FOR MEDIA ATTENTION, BUT WE MUST BE DILIGENT.

EFFECTIVE ACTION ON OUR PART WILL DEPRIVE OUR ASSAILANT OF A PROPOGANDA VOICE. MY SECURITY BRANCH, WITH YOUR HELP, WILL INSTANTLY PUT AN END TO THIS THREAT.

*THE REALITY OF THE MATTER IS THAT JASON WYNN HAS BEEN THREATENED BY **SPAWN**, NOT SOME IDEOLOGICAL EXTREMIST.*

YES, SIR.

IF SPAWN DOESN'T ACTUALLY SHOW, WYNN'S CREDIBILITY WILL BE DAMAGED. THE WAY OUT WAS TO SPEAK IN GENERALITIES AND CHARGED PHRASES. THE SCENARIO WAS ROUTINE ENOUGH OTHERWISE. HIS SUBORDINATES DID NOT QUESTION HIS WORD...

*... WHILE WYNN COULD ONLY CHAIN-SMOKE TO SOOTHE HIS GROWING **UNEASE**.*

YOU'LL HAVE OVER THREE HUNDRED SPECIALISTS ON HAND AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT, WITH ENOUGH FIREPOWER TO LEVEL BROOKLYN.

THE ONLY REASON HE'LL SHOW IS IF HE HAS A DEATH WISH.

UNFORTUNATELY, THEY ALL **DO**, COMMANDER.

DAWN. A TIME OF REBIRTH.

WHEN LIGHT AGAIN GRACES THE CONSECRATED DOMAIN OF EARTH.

COMMANDING THOSE THAT OBEY THE **DARKNESS** TO **HIDE** ONCE MORE.

LEAVING THOSE CAPABLE OF AT LEAST THE **POTENTIAL** FOR GOOD TO CARRY ON THE DAY'S WORK.

WITH THE LIGHT COMES **STRENGTH**, SO THAT THOSE WHO NOW HOLD SWAY CAN EMBRACE THE DAY WITH **VIGOR**. EVEN THOSE BORN TO **HELL**.

HE NOW **RISES**, THE METAMORPHOSIS COMPLETE.

THE HELL CREATURE HAS **FED**.

NOW, **MIND** CAN **RESUME** ITS INFLUENCE OVER BODY.

AT THE SAME TIME, IT TELEGRAPHS A **NEED**--

--WHICH CAN ONLY BE **MET** THROUGH A RADICAL **ALTERATION** OF EXTERIOR IMAGE.

NOT BAD. NOW, THERE'S JUST ONE MORE THING...

GOT IT.

A FEW BLOCKS LATER...

YO! DUDE. LOOKIN' FOR SOMETHING SPECIAL? WE GOT ALL KINDS.

BLONDES. BRUNETTES. REDHEADS.

... A BIG STRAPPING LAD LIKE YOU MIGHT NEED *TWO*. ONLY $30 A POKE. WHATCHA *SAY*, unh?

WHAT'S THE MATTER, CAN'T *TALK*? THAT'S OKAY. THE GIRLS LIKE THE SILENT TYPE. THINK IT OVER FOR A MINUTE.

POKE

YEAH...

I'M NOT IN THE **MOOD**. WHAT ABOUT **YOU**?!

I...

I...

I...

I...

DIDN'T THINK SO.

ACROSS TOWN IN THE LOW RENT DISTRICT RESTS THE OFFICE OF PRIVATE DETECTIVES SAM BURKE AND TWITCH WILLIAMS.

YOU KNOW, SIR, AS I STUDY THIS GROUP OF OUR EARLY FILES, I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK THEY'RE ALL SOMEHOW RELATED.

CHOMP CHOMP

WHAT'CHA *TALKING* ABOUT? YOU THINK THIS SPAWN GUY HAS CONNECTIONS TO SOME HEAVYWEIGHT POLITICIANS?

BURP

'SCUSE ME.

NOT EXACTLY.

SENATOR JENNINGS. CHIEF BANKS. SPAWN. KINCAID. EVEN THE ATTACK ON THAT U.S. SECURITY AGENCY HEADQUARTERS BUILDING. ALL THIS ACTIVITY KEEPS POINTING TO SOMEONE *VERY* HIGH UP. TAKE A LOOK.

AND YOU THINK HE'S OUR *PUPPET MASTER?*

BUT THE STRING OF EVENTS THAT LED ULTIMATELY TO OUR LEAVING THE FORCE KEEPS TWISTING BACK ON ITSELF.

LISTEN, HERE'S WHAT *STILL* GIVES ME A BLEEDING ULCER. WHY THE HELL WERE WE THE POOR SAPS THAT GOT STUCK WITH KINCAID'S DEAD BODY? *

HAVEN'T FIGURED THAT OUT, SIR.

* ISSUE 5-- Tom.

SO FAR THE ONLY CORRELATION IS OUR PRESENCE AT HIS PAROLE HEARING. STILL, IT DOESN'T APPEAR THAT SPAWN IS IN BED WITH ANY OF THEM.

LOOK, ALL I KNOW IS, HE GOT US SUSPENDED AND I WANT MY PAYBACK. I DON'T *LIKE* WHEN THINGS GET MESSY.

Um...

I ASSUME YOU MEAN THAT FIGURATIVELY.

Ring

YEAH YEAH. I'LL GET TO THE GARBAGE LATER. YOU SURE IT'S NOT *YOUR* TURN?

HELLO?

WHEN? AND YOUR PEOPLE HAVEN'T MOVED ON IT? PERFECT! THANKS, SCOTT. 'BYE.

KLIK

WELL, SPEAK OF THE DEVIL. GRAB YOUR COAT, TWITCH.

YOU REMEMBER GEDDES, OVER IN ACCOUNTING? HE SAID THE PRECINCT'S BEEN CRAWLING WITH S.W.A.T. LATELY, ALL HOT ON THE TRAIL OF OUR COSTUMED FRIEND.

SEEMS OUR VIGILANTE'S INTO KIDNAPPING LITTLE GIRLS.

SOUNDS LIKE THE SAME FETISH THAT KINCAID HAD, SIR.

YEAH, WELL, I'M SURE HE DIDN'T KNOCK KINCAID *OFF* JUST SO HE COULD HAVE A MONOPOLY ON THE LOCAL PLAYGROUND.

GEDDES *ALSO* SAID A COUPL'A DRUNKS HEARD THAT SPAWN RECENTLY MOVED TO A NEW *LOCATION*-- DEEP IN THE HEART OF *RAT CITY.*

SO WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH?

LIKE I *SAID,* WHY DID HE DUMP KINCAID'S BODY ON *OUR* DESK, CUSTOMIZED AN' ALL WITH SHAPENED POPSICLE STICKS?

HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED THE POSSIBILITY THAT THERE MAY NOT *BE* ANY LOGIC TO HIS ACTIONS. WE MIGHT'VE JUST BEEN RANDOM TARGETS.

I DOUBT IT. GUYS LIKE HIM DO THINGS IN A PRECISE WAY. COSTUMED FREAKS ALWAYS PERCEIVE THEMSELVES AS BEING BETTER. SMARTER. OR WHATEVER THEY NEED TO JUSTIFY THEIR ACTIONS.

JUST LIKE *SUTURE.** IT GIVES THEM A SENSE OF *POWER,* I GUESS. EITHER WAY, I INTEND ON GETTING A FEW *ANSWERS* BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.

*SEE *CURSE OF THE SPAWN* 5 THROUGH 8 -- Tom.

IN SUBURBAN QUEENS, A FAMILY TOUCHED BY THE CURSE OF HELL'S NEW WARRIOR TRIES VALIENTLY TO RETAIN AS MUCH NORMALITY AS POSSIBLE.

OKAY. HERE YOU GO. PUT YOUR ARMS TOGETHER NOW. YOU CAN'T CATCH LIKE THAT.

YES ME CAN.

TERRY, I'M GOING TO GET MORE ICE TEA. CAN I BRING YOU ANY?

BMP

NICE CATCH, CYAN. YOU'RE ALMOST AS GOOD AS JOSE CANSECO DEFENSIVELY.

NO THANKS.

NOW GO GET THE BALL. BUT STAY AWAY FROM THE ROAD.

HERE YOU GO, CYAN.

TANKS!

IT'S TIME WE HAD A LITTLE FACE TO FACE, TERRY.

EXCUSE ME? DO I KNOW...

SWEET JESUS.

AL...?!

WHAT'S GOING ON? I THOUGHT YOU COULDN'T REGENERATE YOUR FLESH... THAT YOUR SCARS WERE PERMANENT.

SO DID I. BUT EVERY TIME I THINK I'VE GOT A HANDLE ON MY POWERS, SOMETHING NEW HAPPENS.

I DIDN'T DO THIS. IT JUST HAPPENED ON ITS OWN LAST NIGHT.* I CAME HERE TO LET YOU SEE FOR YOURSELF... AND TO LET YOU KNOW HOW THINGS ARE GOING TO GO DOWN.

I'M HAVING A MEETING OF THE MINDS WITH WYNN TONIGHT. AND EITHER HE BACKS AWAY FROM YOU AND WANDA OR I BURN HIS BUILDING TO THE GROUND.

ARE YOU CRAZY?

* LAST ISSUE -- Tom.

MAYBE. I GUESS I'LL FIND OUT TONIGHT.

HIS CALMNESS SEEMS OUT OF PLACE RIGHT NOW. THAT SCARES TERRY.

DAMMIT, AL. WE'VE WORKED ***TOO HARD*** TRYING TO DO THIS ***SYSTEMATICALLY.*** FROM A DISTANCE, WE'VE GOT WYNN ON THE ROPES ***ALREADY.*** ONCE ONE OR TWO MORE DOMINOES FALL, WYNN'S WHOLE INTERNATIONAL ***SET-UP*** FALLS APART.

THOSE PLANS HAVE CHANGED. WYNN'S AWARE OF OUR ACTIVITY. **ESPECIALLY YOURS.** THE TIME FOR SUBTLETY HAS PASSED. I'LL LET YOU KNOW HOW THINGS TURN OUT.

UNFORTUNATELY, WE HAVE A **BIGGER** PROBLEM. I'M COMING BACK FOR WANDA. LETTING HER KNOW I'M ALIVE. I'M GOING TO DO EVERYTHING WITHIN MY MEANS TO BE WITH **MY WIFE** AGAIN.

YEAH?!

WELL, SHE'S ***MY*** WIFE ***TOO!*** SO IF YOU THINK I'M JUST GOING TO ***ROLL OVER*** AND ***DIE,*** THINK ***AGAIN.***

TERRY? WHO WAS THAT YOU WERE TALKING TO?

I DON'T KNOW. JUST SOMEONE I THOUGHT I ONCE KNEW.

MY MISTAKE.

THEN WE'VE JUST BECOME ENEMIES, I GUESS.

mmm... GOOD WATER.

ELSEWHERE...

YOUR UNITS HAVE BEEN COMPLETELY BRIEFED, THEN? GOOD. THEN IT APPEARS THERE'S NOTHING LEFT TO DO BUT *WAIT.*

SINCE WE'RE UP ON THE WEEK-END, THE NUMBER OF EVACUEES WILL BE LIMITED.

TUNK

VMM

VERY IMPRESSIVE. MALEBOLGIA SHOULD BE QUITE *PLEASED* YOU'VE ACCEPTED HIS PLANS FOR YOU.

SO THIS IS WHERE IT'S ALL LED? YOU EXACT-ING YOUR POUND OF FLESH. GETTING RETRIBUTION.

LOOK, COG, IF YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING ON YOUR MIND, **SPIT IT OUT.** BUT CAN THE SARCASM. I'M NOT IN THE MOOD.

...TRY AND REMEMBER WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE A **MAN**. SURELY YOU HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN **THAT**, NOW HAVE YOU?

OR DID YOU TELL ME THAT YOU WERE ONCE A SPAWN JUST TO **IMPRESS** ME?*

AND BEFORE YOU START IN ON ONE OF YOUR SERMONS...

BETTER YET, WHY DON'T YOU **HELP** ME? IF YOU ARE WHAT YOU SAY THEN FIGHT **WITH** ME. AND IF I GET WHAT I WANT OUT OF WYNN, THEN I'LL JOIN IN WHATEVER GRUDGE MATCH **YOU** HAVE WITH **HELL**.

OTHER-WISE, I COULDN'T GIVE A **CRAP** WHAT THEY EXPECT FROM ME.

*ISSUE #50 -- Tom.

I CAN'T.

I FIGURED AS MUCH.

YOU SEE, UNLIKE YOU, *I* DON'T HAVE THE LUXURY OF TIME.

BUT WHEN I *DID* HAVE A CHOICE, I WEIGHED THE ***CONSEQUENCES*** OF MY ACTIONS. PEOPLE OUTSIDE OUR CONTROL ARE CONTINUALLY GETTING CAUGHT IN OUR CROSSFIRE. THEY PAY A PRICE WE NEVER SEE.

YOUR *IDENTITY* HAS BEEN GIVEN BACK...

...JUST DON'T BE SO SURE IT WILL LAST FOREVER.

I'M **NOT**. THAT'S WHY I NEED TO STOP WYNN. SO I CAN CONCENTRATE ON WHAT'S **IMPOR-TANT**.

THEN MAKE ***THAT*** THE PRIORITY INSTEAD OF YOUR VENGEANCE.

DON'T YOU SEE? HELL WANTS YOU TO KEEP KILLING. THEY ***NEED*** THAT. YOU'RE PLAYING THEIR GAME!

THEN I'LL PLAY DIRTY!

TO BE CONTINUED!

SPAWN®

64 DIGITAL EDITION

Capullo '97

McFARLANE n. WOLF

SINCE HIS STARTLING RETURN FROM THE GRAVE, **SPAWN** HAS BEEN MOVING **AIMLESSLY** THROUGH EACH DAY... TRYING TO FIND A DIRECTION HE CAN **JUSTIFY** ONCE HE GETS BEYOND THAT MOMENT'S **RAGE.**

NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A WHILE, THERE IS A DISTINCT **PURPOSE** TO HIS ACTIONS. A **PLAN.** SET INTO PLAY BY A SEEMINGLY RANDOM BOLT OF ENERGY THAT MYSTERIOUSLY RESTORED HIS HUMAN FEATURES.

THOUGH HE'S STILL COMPOSED OF **NECRO-PLASM,** SPAWN BELIEVES HE IS **WHOLE** ONCE AGAIN. THIS BROUGHT INTO FOCUS A CLEAR VISION OF WHAT MUST BE **DONE** NOW THAT HE'S RE-CAPTURED HIS IDENTITY AS **AL SIMMONS**... AND WITH IT HIS LOST **HUMANITY.**

HIS STRATEGY IS **TWO-FOLD:**

NEUTRALIZE HIS ENEMY, THEN SHOW HIMSELF TO THE **ONE PERSON** HE EXISTS FOR...

...HIS **WIFE. WANDA.**

BUT HE CAN'T INVADE HER LIFE UNLESS HE'S SURE HE CAN **PROTECT** HER. THAT'S WHY TONIGHT BECOMES SO **VERY** IMPORTANT.

IF STRENGTH IS POWER, AND POWER COMES FROM **DOMINATION,** THEN HE MEANS TO LORD OVER JASON WYNN...

...OVERWHELM HIM TO SUCH A DEGREE THAT WYNN WILL BE CRIPPLED EMOTIONALLY... **PARANOID...** FOR THE REST OF HIS NATURAL LIFE.

ORIGINALLY, SPAWN WANTED TO JUST **KILL** HIM. BUT IT WASN'T THAT SIMPLE. WYNN **ANTICIPATED** THAT RISK, AND TIED HIS OWN SAFETY TO THAT OF PEOPLE WHO SPAWN HAS, INEXPLICABLY, SHOWN AN INTEREST. SO INSTEAD, HE GAVE WYNN HIS **WARNING**:

SO TONIGHT, HE'LL DELIVER THE **REST** OF THE MESSAGE **PERSONALLY**.

ALL UNITS HAVE ARRIVED, COMMANDER HULL.

"I STAY **AWAY** FROM WANDA AND HER FAMILY. DO I MAKE MYSELF **CLEAR**?!"

BUT HE ALSO KNEW THAT WYNN NEEDED MORE THAN A **THREAT**.

PERFECT. DEPLOY ALPHA GROUP INTO THE MAIN LOBBY, THEN SEND BAKER AND CHARLIE UNITS NEXT.

I'LL NEED TO BRIEF THE GENERALS ON A FEW DETAILS BEFORE WE STATION THE REMAINING SQUADS. SITUATION STATUS?

WHAT'S OUR FINAL COUNT?

NEARLY FOUR HUNDRED, SIR.

"QUIET ON ALL FRONTS, COMMANDER. I'LL KEEP YOU POSTED. OVER."

NARROWED GREEN SLITS SURVEY THE SEA OF THE TECHNO-SECURITY FORCE.

HE CAN'T TAKE THEM ON. THERE'S FAR TOO MANY OF THEM.

BUT THAT'S A GOOD THING. IT MEANS WYNN IS TRULY SCARED.

SO, WITH A THOUGHT, HE **MELDS** WITH HIS SYMBIOTIC SUIT. WILLS IT TO CHANGE. **MORPH**. INTO A DESIRED STATE THAT WILL ENABLE HIM TO BLEND WITH HIS ENEMIES.

YES, SIR.

HERE, SOLDIER, GRAB YOUR INFRA-GOGGLES AND QUIT STRAGGLING BEHIND.

A GHOST HAS NOW BECOME **CHAMELEON.**

ELSEWHERE IN THAT CONCRETE JUNGLE...

SHUT UP! I DON'T WANT TO LISTEN TO YOUR LIES ANYMORE!

OKAY, YOU ALLEY PUNKS! PAY ATTENTION!

I'VE JUST ABOUT *HAD* IT WITH YOUR DEAF'N'DUMB ACT. NOW I KNOW SPAWN HANGS 'ROUND HERE *SOMEPLACE.* AND BELIEVE ME, I'M *GOING* TO FIND HIM.

SO LET'S DROP THE SEE-NO-EVIL, HEAR-NO-EVIL ROUTINE.

HOW 'BOUT YOU? RED CAPE. LOTS OF SPIKES. TIGHT UNDER-WEAR. RING ANY BELLS?

WELLLL... I THINK IRENE THE DOMINATRIX IS WHO YOU'RE DESCRIBING.

HA HA! GOOD ONE, NEIL!

LOOK! IF I WANT A SMART-ASS ANSWER, I'LL *ASK* FOR ONE.

BUT I'LL LET YOU IN ON A LITTLE SECRET. YOUR HERO? YOUR SO-CALLED *SAVIOR?* HE'S WANTED FOR KIDNAPPING AND *MURDER.*

GLUK!

SO DON'T BE SO SURE HE WON'T SNUFF YOU IN YOUR SLEEP.

CLATTER

!

DID YOU HEAR THAT, SIR?

YEAH. SOUNDS LIKE WE'VE GOT A PEEPING TOM.

LET'S GO.

EVENTUALLY, THE CONTORTED ALLEY DEAD-ENDS.

OKAY, PUNK! STEP OUT INTO THE LIGHT, AND **NO SUDDEN MOVES!**

YOU NEEDN'T WORRY ABOUT MY ACTIONS, DETECTIVE. IT'S ***YOURS*** THAT ARE CAUSE FOR FAR GREATER CONCERN.

WHAT'RE YOU MUMBLING ABOUT?

SPAWN. BILLY KINCAID. YOURSELVES. MR. TWITCH. YOU ARE ALL INSEPARABLY LINKED.

UNFOR-TUNATELY, WE CAN'T DISCUSS THIS WHILE YOU MEAN TO INTIMIDATE ME WITH YOUR FIRE-POWER.

HOW DO YOU KNOW ABOUT KINCAID?

THAT'S NOT IMPORTANT, IT'S JUST A DETAIL. BUT I WILL TELL YOU THIS-- IT WASN'T BY ACCIDENT THAT SPAWN LEFT KINCAID'S LIFELESS BODY IN YOUR OFFICE. *

HE PICKED YOU TWO SPECIFICALLY, TO SERVE A PURPOSE HE HAS IN MIND.

*BACK IN ISSUE 5 -- Tom.

LISTEN, BUD, WHAT I'M MORE CURIOUS ABOUT ***RIGHT NOW*** IS HOW THE HELL YOU EVEN ***KNOW*** ABOUT ANY OF THIS. YOU GOT CONTACTS ON THE FORCE? AN INFORMANT?

I JUST KNOW.

I'M IN NO ***MOOD*** FOR THIS. IF YOU'RE LOOKIN' FOR TROUBLE...

PLEASE, SIR. LET'S LISTEN TO WHAT THIS MAN HAS TO SAY. ANY NEW INFORMATION HE'LL GIVE US WILL HELP OUR SEARCH. WE'LL WORRY ABOUT THE REST LATER.

BESIDES, I'M SENSING HE NEEDS US AS MUCH AS WE NEED HIM.

YOU ARE VERY WISE, DETECTIVE.

THE PERSON YOU REFER TO AS 'SPAWN' IS NOT HERE AT THE MOMENT. HE HAS DELUDED HIMSELF INTO BELIEVING HE CAN RECAPTURE THE PAST, RATHER THAN LIVE IN THE PRESENT WHILE PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

AFTER ALL, CONFUSION ***IS*** THE STATE IN WHICH HELL PREFERS HE DWELLS.

THAT'S HOW THEY CONTROL HIM. UNTIL HE CONQUERS HIS ANGER, SPAWN WILL ***NEVER*** TRULY HAVE A CHANCE OF BEING A MAN AGAIN.

BELIEVE WHAT YOU MUST. ***MY*** JOB IS MERELY TO ***PRESENT*** THE FACTS.

ARE WE SUPPOSED TO ***BUY*** ALL THIS?

ALPHA UNIT IN POSITION, COMMANDER.

COPY.

OKAY, LET'S GET *BAKER* UNIT IN. THEY'LL RECON THE SUBSURFACE LEVELS.

ONCE INSIDE, SPAWN MOVES PURPOSE-FULLY, TO THE SOUTHEAST WALL.

HE **KNOWS** THIS BUILDING...

TIME LOCK

... KNOWS WHAT IT'S CAPABLE OF **DOING**. HIS DAYS AS A SANCTIONED ENFORCEMENT AGENT WERE NOT WASTED.

WHAT...?!!

JEEZUS CHRIST, JOHNSON, YOU'VE GOT LOCKDOWN. I ***REPEAT.*** YOU'VE GOT ***LOCKDOWN!*** ONLY A ***HUNDRED MEN*** MADE IT INSIDE!

SOMEONE TRIPPED THE CODE, COMMANDER, IT'S SEALED SHUT FOR THE NEXT EIGHT HOURS!

KNK!

AND SO THE ENEMY THEY'VE BEEN MOBILIZED TO REPEL HAS JUST WALKED THROUGH THE FRONT DOORS, **UNTOUCHED.**

LISTEN UP!
WE'VE GOT NEW ORDERS. SPLIT INTO GROUPS OF THREE AND TAKE A FLOOR.
STAY IN SIGHT OF EACH OTHER. CALL IN ANY DISTURBANCE. THE ASSAILANT MAY ALREADY BE INSIDE.
ROMANICK, SHAW. YOU'RE WITH ME. LET'S GO.
SPAWN'S FIRST KILL IS QUICK. PAINLESS.
Uh?
WHERE'S SHAW?
GODDAMMIT. DID YOU *HEAR* ME, SOLDIER? I SAID, WHERE'D SHAW DISAPPEAR TO?
SPAWN KNOWS THAT THESE MEN WILL KILL HIM ON SIGHT. IT'S HOW THEY THINK. HOW THEY'VE BEEN PROGRAMMED.
THOUGH THEY'RE NOT HIS TARGETS, HE'S NOT ABOUT TO GIVE ANY OF THEM THE CHANCE TO SHOW WHY THEY WERE CHOSEN FOR JASON WYNN'S PRIVATE SECURITY DIVISION.

INSTEAD, HE'LL PROVE BEYOND ANY DOUBT THAT HIS ASSASSINS' SKILLS-- MIXED WITH POWERS BROUGHT UP FROM HELL'S BLACK GULLET-- RESULT IN A **FURY** THAT WILL NOT BE DENIED.

ANOTHER CRACKLE OF ENERGY: **SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS** SHORT OUT.

I HAVE A BLACKOUT ON FLOOR SIX, EAST SECTION.

IS IT THE, CAMERA, OR A POWER FLUCTUA-TION?

WORKING ON THAT, SIR.

"WELL, JUST MAKE SURE YOU DON'T LOSE CONTROL OF FLOOR **FIFTEEN**. WYNN'LL HAVE OUR BALLS IF ANYTHING GETS NEAR HIS OFFICE."

ON THAT SELFSAME FLOOR, A SMALL **BATTALION** HAS SECURED THEIR COMMANDER FROM ALL SIDES.

HOWEVER, HE ALLOWS NONE INSIDE THE OFFICE ITSELF. HE'LL NOT BE PANDERED TO.

HE ALONE WILL BE ULTIMATELY IN CHARGE OF THIS CONFRONTATION... AND HIS INTUITION TELLS HIM THAT SOMETHING IS WRONG ALREADY.

SENDING REINFORCE-MENTS TO THE FIFTEENTH.

NOT IF SPAWN CAN HELP IT.

WHICH HE CAN.

WHAT'S LEFT AT THE BOTTOM BARELY RESEMBLES ANYTHING HUMAN.

DEAR GOD.

STAIRS

JOHNSON-- HAVE YOU SIGHTED THE TARGET? IS HE INSIDE?

STILL TRYING TO VERIFY...

CRAP! WE'VE GOT A LOSS OF ELECTRICAL POWER ON SEVEN.

YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONES. OUR MONITORS HAVE GONE OUT. YOU GUYS ARE ON YOUR OWN NOW.

TELEPHONES ARE OUT TOO. SOMEONE GET TO *WYNN. NOW!*

THEY USE THE STAIR-WELLS NOW, AS NONE OF THE ELEVATORS ARE RE-SPONDING.

SPAWN'S COSTUME SEVERED ALL THE CABLES BEFORE KNOCKING OUT ONE OF THE GENER-ATORS.

"SEND MORE UNITS TO THE THIRD SUB-BASEMENT! *DEFEND THE GENER-ATORS!*"

WHAT DO YOU HAVE HERE, SOLDIER ?

A JAMMED DOOR -- TO THE SECURITY AND LIGHTING SYSTEMS.

BLUEPRINTS SHOW THIS IS THE ONLY ENTRANCE.

"THEN LET'S GAS IT FIRST."

FOOF

A FEW WELL-PLACED SALVOS WEAKEN THE HINGES, ALLOWING THE TROOP TO THEN BATTER THE DOOR OPEN.

THERE HE IS! NAIL HIM!

RTTT

BRTTTT

AS A THICK TOXIC CLOUD BLANKETS THE VITAL NERVE CENTER, **DARKNESS** BECOMES A TREACHEROUS ALLY FOR **BOTH** SIDES.

CRNCH

OVER ***HERE!*** HIS ***MASK!*** SOMEONE MUST HAVE ***WINGED*** THE SCUMBAG.

THAT MEANS HE'S WOUNDED, SO FAN OUT...

SWITCH TO NIGHT VISION. INFRA-RED NINE.

...HE CAN'T LAST MORE THAN A COUPLE OF MINUTES WITHOUT A RESPIRATOR.

SIR!

I HAVE *CONTACT!* LOOKS LIKE THE GAS FINISHED HIM.

I HOPE YOU ROT IN *HELL*, YOU SONOVABITCH.

THE OTHERS MAKE THEIR WAY TO THE FRESH CORPSE, WONDERING WHAT KIND OF CRAZY MAN THINKS HE CAN TAKE ON A WHOLE TASK FORCE.

*THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE: ONE WHO **ISN'T A MAN** ANYMORE.*

*HIS LUNGS DON'T WORK LIKE OURS, SO THE GAS MASK WAS JUST A **DECOY**. SOMETHING TO GET THEIR GUARD DOWN.*

HE'S ABOUT TO TAKE BRUTAL ADVANTAGE OF THEIR ERROR.

*ANOTHER FIVE MINUTES AND THE **REST** OF THE BUILDING GOES BLACK.*

DINK!

WHAT NOW?!

SILENCE IS THE MESSAGE NOW WHISPERING THROUGH THE PHONE LINES, ANNOUNCING A VERY CHILLING FACT:

SPAWN IS DOING EXACTLY AS HE PLEASES.

IT WAS NEVER **ABOUT** WIPING OUT AN ARMY. THAT COULDN'T BE **DONE**... NOT EVEN IN SPAWN'S HELLISH NEW FORM.

DAMMIT! WE'VE LOST RADIO CONTACT.

RATHER, IT WAS ONE OF THE OLDEST STRATEGIES IN THE BOOK: **DIVIDE AND CONQUER.**

NEARLY THREE-QUARTERS OF HIS OPPONENTS WERE LEFT **OUTSIDE.** AND THE REST... THOSE UNFORTUNATE ENOUGH TO HAVE GOTTEN **INSIDE**... THEY'RE NOW CHASING **SHADOWS.**

A WISP. AN **APPARITION.**

AS Lt. COLONEL AL SIMMONS, HE KNEW THE LAYOUT OF THIS STRUCTURE LIKE THE BACK OF HIS HAND.

EVEN NOW, AS THE BACK-UP GENERATORS KICK IN, HIS PRESENCE WILL BE THAT OF A SMALL **ARMY.**

ALL UNITS-- WE HAVE DATA LINK-UP BACK. INTRUDER IS ON LEVEL 27. PROCEED...

WAIT! SOMETHING *ELSE* IS ON LEVEL *8*. I...

CRAP! WE LOST HIM.

THOSE ROOFTOP GENERATORS AREN'T HELPING THE PHONES! WE CAN'T PIN DOWN HOW *MANY* THERE ARE...

*HE CAN'T BELIEVE THERE'S ONLY **ONE**... BUT IT'S A CREATURE WHOSE CLOSEST CONNECTION IS WITH THE INKY SHADOWS.*

OVER *THERE!* WHAT THE HELL IS *THAT?!*

CONTROL! WE HAVE IT TRAPPED ON THE *17th FLOOR.*

BRTTTT BRRT

BRACING FOR THE WORST, THEY ROUND THE CORNER.

NOTHING.

THE HALLWAY IS EMPTY.

*SEVERAL SECONDS PASS. THEN-- THE FLOOR BENEATH THEIR FEET VIBRATES--THEN CONVULSES **WILDLY, SWALLOWING** ALL WHO DARE STAND IN ITS WAY...*

... LEAVING ITS DISPASSIONATE HOST FREE TO HUNT ELSEWHERE ...

... BLENDING NOW WITH THE SHADOWS THAT DRAPE THE ENORMOUS, OPULENT ROOM.

THE TIME HAS NOW COME FOR HELL'S GRIM REAPER TO MANIFEST ITSELF.

SPAWN ALLOWS JUST THE SLIGHTEST HISS TO EMANATE FROM HIS UNIFORM.

THOUGH NERVOUS, JASON WYNN STANDS **MOTIONLESS** AS THE ICY HAND OF DEATH DRAWS NEAR. HE REFUSES TO ACKNOWLEDGE SPAWN'S PRESENCE.

HIS HEART'S POUNDING INTENSIFIES... UNTIL IT FEELS LIKE IT'S ABOUT TO **BURST.**

IT'S JUDGMENT DAY.

SLAM

FROM WITHOUT, EFFORTS ARE BEING MADE TO INFLUENCE THE SIEGE'S OUTCOME.

SLAM

YOU SAY ONE WORD AND I'LL CUT YOUR TONGUE OUT.

UNDERSTAND? JUST NOD. GOOD.

LET'S GET A FEW THINGS STRAIGHT. I'M ABOUT TO DESTROY YOUR LIFE. THE POWER BASE YOU'VE BUILT THROUGH MANIPULATION AND SLAUGHTER IS ABOUT TO CRUMBLE AWAY.

SEE, I KNOW WHAT MAKES YOU **TICK**, JASON. AND I'M GOING TO **SLOWLY** TAKE THAT **AWAY** FROM YOU. BY THE TIME I'M DONE YOU WON'T HAVE AN INTERNATIONAL CONTACT THAT'LL EVEN **SPIT** IN YOUR DIRECTION.

"YOUR REIGN OF TERROR IS **OVER**."

FINALLY, THE BUILDING'S OUTER WALL IS BREACHED.

I'M YOUR MASTER NOW!

SO IF YOU DO **ANOTHER THING** TO HARM WANDA OR HER FAMILY, I'LL MAKE IT MY UNHOLY MISSION THAT YOU DIE **THAT SAME DAY.**

YOU'VE ALREADY SEEN THAT NOTHING CAN STOP ME. NOW, BEFORE I GO, I WANT YOU TO **SEE** WHAT YOU'VE CREATED.

I WANT YOU TO KNOW **WHO'S** GOING TO HAUNT YOUR EVERY MOVE.

THOUGH HE IS NOT AWARE OF IT, SPAWN'S DETERIORATION MAKES ANY CHANCE OF RECOGNITION AN IMPOSSIBILITY.

AS THE COSTUME-CREATURE RETRACTS, THE REMNANTS OF A MAN'S FACE ARE BARELY DISCERNABLE. ROT AND PUS-FILLED BLISTERS HAVE AGAIN COME TO DOMINATE.

THAT DIRECTIVE OF YOURS TYING THE LIVES OF WANDA AND HER FAMILY TO **YOUR** SAFETY WILL KEEP YOU ALIVE. FOR NOW. BUT DEATH IS **ALL** YOU'LL BE PROTECTED FROM. SO CHECK OVER YOUR SHOULDER IF THINGS GO WRONG. I'LL **BE** THERE.

AS HE SPEAKS, BITS OF DECOM-POSED FLESH FALL AWAY.

SUDDENLY--A STAMPEDE OF HEAVY FOOT-STEPS JUST OUTSIDE WYNN'S OFFICE.

KICK DOWN THOSE DOORS!

HURRY!

I'M GOING TO BURN YOUR EMPIRE TO THE GROUND. AND YOU'LL SIT BY AND DO NOTHING--OR YOU'RE DEAD!

YOUR DIRECTIVE BE DAMNED.

KRASH!

OUTSIDE, SYMBIOTE AND HOST RENDEZVOUS.

IN A MOMENT, A JOYOUS REUNION WILL MAKE THEM BOTH **WHOLE** AGAIN.

SLAM!

SIR?!

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?! WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? WE THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE IN TROUBLE. HE MUST'VE GOTTEN TO YOU--

NO, YOU'RE WRONG... I HAVEN'T SEEN A *THING*.

"NOT A *DAMNED THING*.

Image

65

DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN®

NEW YORK CITY.
SO WELL EXPLORED, SO WELL EXPLOITED. NO ONE HERE **BELONGS** HERE, REALLY, AND THEY ALL **KNOW** IT. THOSE OLD IMMIGRANT AREAS, WHERE THEIR **GRANDPARENTS** LIVED? ANYONE WITH THE MOXIE MOVES **FAR** FROM THERE, MAYBE A MILE OR TWO UPTOWN. LOOKING BACK IS FOR GUILTY PLEASURES... CHEAP NIGHTCLUBS, CHEAP **THRILLS**... AND A CURIOUS FASCINATION WITH WHAT **KIND** OF LIFE STILL **DWELLS** IN THE OLD, NARROW STREETS.

FIRST THERE WAS **THE** BOWERY, NEXT TO GREENWICH VILLAGE... SO CONVENIENT FOR WEEKEND **SLUMMING**. THEN THE **NEWER** TRENDY AREAS NEEDED THEIR **OWN** NEARBY SLUMS AND THE NAME BECAME **GENERIC**. SO, JUST BEYOND EVERY REDEVELOPED TRAIN STATION AND SHOPPING STRIP... WHEREVER THE MONEY RAN OUT... THERE LAY **A BOWERY.**

THAT WAS **THEN.**

LATELY, THESE PLACES HAVE BECOME BEACONS FOR **MORE** THAN JUST THE OUTCAST. WANNABE-TRENDIES, SCROUNGING FOR ADVENTURE AND CHEAP DIGS, **TOOK OVER** THE LESS-LOUSY HOVELS. THE **TRULY** HOPELESS WERE PUSHED DEEPER INTO THE MAZE. THOSE WHO **SURVIVED** THE CROWDING BECAME HARDER. MORE EMOTIONALLY UNBALANCED. MORE **IN SYNC** WITH THEIR CRUMBLING **ENVIRONS.**

"DECENT CITIZENS" CAME TO **FEAR** THESE TRANSIENTS AND VAGRANTS. **CITY GOVERNMENT** TRIES TO SWEEP THEM AWAY. AND THE **POLICE** JUST PLAIN **HATE** THEM.

AND THE PLACE ITSELF? AFTER EVEN ITS **NAME** WAS STOLEN BY THOSE WHO HAD STRIPPED IT OF EVERYTHING ELSE--THIS DESTITUTE PIT HAS BEEN GIVEN A **NEW** ONE.
"RAT CITY," THEY CALL IT. HOME TO GANGS, PIMPS AND PROSTITUTES, DRUG DEALERS AND JUNKIES. **ANY AND ALL** WHO HAVE LOST TRACK OF THEIR **SOULS.**

*THE NIGHT AIR IS TURNING FRIGID AS **THREE MEN** ENTER THIS DARK DOMAIN. THEY STRIDE PURPOSEFULLY, HEADING DEEPER INTO SHADOWS THAT BLANKET WHAT LITTLE THEY CAN STILL SEE. IN THE LEAD IS **COGLIOSTRO**. HE LOOKS ALL TOO MUCH LIKE ONE OF THE DOWN-TRODDEN EXCEPT FOR THOSE EYES.*

THOSE EYES.

*WITHIN HIS WRINKLED FACE ARE A PAIR OF **COAL BLACK EYES**. EYES THAT, ACCORDING TO THOSE WHO'VE LOOKED **INTO** THEM, GIVE THE SENSE THAT HE HAS SEEN THINGS MOST OF US COULD NEVER **IMAGINE**.*

TONIGHT HE INTENDS TO SHARE SOME OF HIS CAREFULLY GUARDED WISDOM WITH THOSE WHO NOW ACCOMPANY HIM... THOUGH NOT QUICKLY ENOUGH TO SUIT ONE OF THEM.

"OKAY! THIS IS FAR ***ENOUGH***, OLD MAN," *BARKS THE DISHEVELED SAM BURKE.* "I'M GETTING TIRED OF WALKING AROUND IN THIS DEAD QUIET WITH NO IDEA ***WHAT*** THE HELL WE'RE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH."

BEFORE REPLYING, COGLIOSTRO TURNS TO FACE THE TWO PRIVATE DETECTIVES. HE LOCKS HIS GAZE ON BURKE. THE MOMENT IS FROZEN... THEN SAM JERKS A HAND NERVOUSLY INTO HIS SOILED TRENCHCOAT'S POCKET, RIFLING AROUND BEFORE PULLING OUT A HALF-EMPTY PACK OF CIGARETTES. BUMPING ONE OUT, HE GLANCES DOWN QUICKLY AS HE LIGHTS IT, THUS BREAKING AWAY FROM COGLIOSTRO'S STARE.

*SAM'S PARTNER, **'TWITCH' WILLIAMS**, STRAIGHTENS HIS TIE AND UNBUTTONS HIS COAT. HE WANTS EASY ACCESS TO HIS SHOULDER HOLSTER IF NEED BE.* "I CONCUR WITH MY PARTNER. WHAT EXACTLY IS THE PURPOSE OF OUR MEETING HERE TONIGHT," *TWITCH ASKS IN A LOW, PENSIVE VOICE.*

"KNOWLEDGE. NOTHING ELSE WOULD HAVE ENTICED YOU HERE," *COGLIOSTRO SAYS.*

"***LOOK!*** I JUST WANT TO KNOW WHY SPAWN SLUNG SOME FAT ***DEAD*** GUY IN MY OFFICE," *BARKS DETECTIVE BURKE.* "YOU GIVE ME THAT ANSWER AND I'LL BELIEVE WHATEVER ***OTHER*** CRAP YOU ***WANT*** ME TO."

"I ASSUME YOU'RE REFERRING TO ***BILLY KINCAID,***" *SAYS COGLIOSTRO.*

"YOU'RE DAMN ***RIGHT*** I AM."

"AS I SAID EARLIER,* DETECTIVE, SPAWN LEFT KINCAID IN YOUR OFFICE FOR A REASON. IT WASN'T A ***RANDOM*** ACT. AT THE TIME, HE WAS STILL IN SHOCK FROM HIS REBIRTH. CONFUSED. IN MANY WAYS, HE STILL ***IS.*** THAT'S HOW HELL NEEDS HIM. OFF-BALANCE. ***UNSURE.*** BECAUSE IN THIS STATE, THE SPAWN WILL ALWAYS GO BACK TO WHAT IT KNOWS BEST... FIGHTING THE URGE ALL THE WHILE... AND THAT IS TO ***KILL.*** THIS NEWLY RECRUITED WARRIOR, THE ONE THEY CALL ***AL,*** IS NO DIFFERENT."

AN AWKWARD SILENCE FILLS THE AIR AS THE TWO DETECTIVES COME TO TERMS WITH WHAT COGLIOSTRO HAS JUST SAID.

"YOU SEE, GENTLEMEN, THOUGH WHAT HE ACCOMPLISHED WAS INTENDED TO BE FOR THE ***GOOD,*** THE ONLY WAY HE KNOWS TO ACHIEVE THAT END IS TO ***DESTROY.*** BY KILLING THE CHILD MOLESTER, HIS SENSE OF ***JUSTICE*** HAS BEEN SATISFIED. HIS RESPONSE TO THE SITUATION -- TO COMMIT A ***MURDER*** -- EXACTLY REVEALS WHY HELL PICKED HIM IN THE FIRST PLACE. YOU SEE, THE DEVIL DOES NOT ***CARE*** THE RATIONALE A MAN MAY SETTLE UPON... ONLY THAT THE LANGUAGE OF EVIL BE ***EXPRESSED*** IN SOME FORM."

*LAST ISSUE.

"WHAT IN CHRIST'S NAME ARE YOU ***TALKING*** ABOUT?!" *BURKE SNEERS WHILE HE DRAGS ANOTHER UNFILTERED LUNGFUL.* "I'M ABOUT ***TEN SECONDS*** AWAY FROM RUNNING YOUR ASS DOWNTOWN. SO LET'S YOU ***DROP*** THE PSYCHOBABBLE AND TRY TALKING LIKE A HUMAN BEING. YOU'VE GOT ANSWERS? THEN LET'S ***HEAR*** THEM. AND WITHOUT THE MELODRAMA, PUH-***LEASE.***"

"YOUR SARCASM IS NOT NECESSARY, DETECTIVE. I MAY HAVE BEEN OBSCURE IN WHAT I WAS SAYING, AND THAT WAS NOT MY WISH. I'LL TRY AGAIN TO PAINT A PICTURE OF THE ONE YOU SO DESPERATELY SEEK. BUT BEFORE I BEGIN, BE ADVISED THAT WHAT I'M ABOUT TO TELL YOU IS THE STORY OF AN UNHOLY ***CURSE*** THAT HAS BEEN PASSED TO MANY OVER ***COUNTLESS*** GENERATIONS... PASSED MOST RECENTLY TO THIS CREATURE KNOWN ONLY AS ***SPAWN.***" *PAUSING A MOMENT, COGLIOSTRO WAITS FOR DETECTIVE WILLIAMS TO READY HIMSELF WITH PEN AND NOTEPAD. HE KNOWS THAT TWITCH WON'T LET EMOTION BLUR HIS OBJECTIVITY... THAT HIS SKILLS AS AN OBSERVER ARE AS WELL-HONED AS HIS SHARPSHOOTING ABILITIES.*

"UM, SIR." *TWITCH INTERJECTS AS HE PUSHES HIS GLASSES UP THE BRIDGE OF HIS NOSE.* "BEFORE WE START, WOULD IT BE POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO GIVE US YOUR NAME? YOU STILL HAVEN'T ***INTRODUCED*** YOURSELF."

"OF COURSE. I AM ***COGLIOSTRO.*** THOSE THAT LIVE HERE CALL ME SIMPLY '***COG***'. YOU MAY DO THE SAME."

TWITCH CATCHES SAM BEFORE HE CAN SAY SOMETHING SNIDE, GIVING HIS PARTNER A LOOK THAT SAYS "LET'S JUST GIVE THIS FIVE MINUTES." SAM NODS, GRUDGINGLY. BOTH GIVE THEIR ATTENTION BACK TO THE OLD MAN.

"YOU WERE ABOUT TO ***SAY... COG?***"

"THE MAN YOU AND YOUR FORMER FELLOW OFFICERS NOW HUNT WAS ONCE MUCH ***LIKE*** YOU. HE WAS A ***SOLDIER*** AND PRIDED HIMSELF ON HIS ROLE IN DEFENDING THIS NATION'S BORDERS. HIS NATURAL ABILITY AND YOUTHFUL ZEAL GAINED HIM QUICK ADVANCEMENT IN THE RANKS. EVENTUALLY, HE WAS ASSIGNED TO WHITE HOUSE SECURITY, AND WHILE THERE HE HELPED FOIL AN ATTEMPT ON THE PRESIDENT'S LIFE. THIS LED TO HIS ULTIMATE RECRUITMENT INTO THE U.S.S.C.*"

COG PAUSES A MOMENT SO SAM CAN INTERRUPT. "***CRIPES!*** ISN'T THAT WHERE WE TRACED ALL THOSE CALLS ***CHIEF BANKS*** WAS MAKING?"

"THAT'S JUST WHAT I WAS THINKING, SIR," *TWITCH REPLIES HESITANTLY.*

"WHAT'S MORE," *COG RESUMES,* "THAT IS WHERE THEY TURNED THE SOMETIMES VIOLENT YOUNG MAN INTO AN ELITE LEVEL ***ASSASSIN...*** BEFORE THEY ***THEMSELVES*** ELIMINATED HIM."

*UNITED STATES SECURITY COUNCIL -- Tom.

"***HIS OWN PEOPLE*** MURDERED HIM IN COLD BLOOD. WHEN HE WAS NO LONGER FIT TO SERVE THEIR NEEDS, HIS BOSS... HIS PEERS... HIS OWN ***COUNTRY*** BETRAYED HIM. ALL BECAUSE THE YOUNG PATRIOT FOUND HIMSELF WITH A MORAL DILEMMA. HE BEGAN TO QUESTION THE ***REASONING*** BEHIND HIS PAST FEW ***ASSASSINATION*** ASSIGNMENTS."

"ARE YOU SAYING THIS GUY IS SOME KINDA FRIGGIN' ***ZOMBIE?!***"

"OH, HE'S ***MUCH*** MORE THAN THAT, DETECTIVE BURKE. HE'S NOW A ***TOOL,*** A ***PAWN*** OF HELL. HE'S BEING PRIMED FOR A ***WAR*** YOU MAY HAVE READ ABOUT... THE ***FINAL BATTLE*** BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL, SET TO BE PLAYED OUT ON EARTH, AT ***ARMAGEDDON.*** THAT'S WHY HE'S BACK. BOTH SIDES WILL NEED GREAT SOLDIERS, AND, EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY, GREAT ***LEADERS.***"

"THAT'S WHAT HE'S BECOME, AN ***OFFICER-IN-TRAINING,*** PLACED BACK ON EARTH TO HONE HIS ABILITIES. ONE DAY, IF HE PROVES HIS POTENTIAL, HE MAY BECOME ONE OF THE EXALTED, CHOSEN FEW... A LEADER OF THE SOULLESS HORDES OF HELL AS THEY ENGAGE GOD'S ARMIES."

COGLIOSTRO PAUSES FOR A BREATH AND TO GIVE THE MEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO ***SCOFF.*** *THIS TIME, THOUGH, NEITHER OF THEM HAS A WORD TO SAY. PERHAPS THEY ARE BEGINNING TO* ***ACCEPT*** *HIS WORDS... OR, MORE TYPICALLY, SHEER* ***DISBELIEF*** *MAY HAVE TEMPERED THEIR INQUIRIES. EITHER WAY, A* ***SEED*** *HAS BEEN PLANTED.*

"I SENSE APPREHENSION ON YOUR PART. I HARDLY BLAME YOU. COME... FOLLOW ME. THERE'S SOMETHING I'D LIKE FOR YOU TO ***SEE.*** A PIECE OF SPAWN'S WORLD THAT MIGHT MAKE ALL THIS A BIT EASIER TO ACCEPT."

WITHOUT PAUSE, COGLIOSTRO TURNS AND HEADS PURPOSEFULLY INTO THE GLOOM. CAUGHT BY SURPRISE, THE TWO DETECTIVES BUSTLE ***AFTER*** *HIM, SAM PUFFING INTENSELY AND TWITCH COMPROMISING NONE OF HIS PENMANSHIP AS HE MATCHES THE PACE. WHETHER BY LUCK OR DESIGN, THEY CATCH SIGHT OF HIM A SCANT HALF-SECOND BEFORE HE ROUNDS A CORNER.*

AS THE THREESOME TRAVERSE THE MAZE OF GARBAGE-RIDDEN PASSAGEWAYS, AN **ODD SENSATION** COMES TO BURKE. SOMETHING IS **WRONG**. BASED ON EVERY PIECE OF INTELLIGENCE HE'S GATHERED ON SPAWN, **THIS** IS **NOT** WHERE THE CLOAKED ENIGMA HAS BEEN SIGHTED. THE CONSENSUS OF THE POLICE PUTS HIS DIGS CLOSER TO 78TH STREET, NOT IN THIS VICINITY. SO WHERE'S THE OLD MAN **TAKING** THEM ? INTO SOME KIND OF SET-UP, A **TRAP?**

STILL, HE AND HIS PARTNER FOLLOW COG INTO THE INKY UNKNOWN.

TURN AFTER TURN THEY MAKE UNTIL IT SEEMS THEY'VE GONE IN CIRCLES.

SUDDENLY, COG STOPS SHORT. "HAVE A LOOK AT WHAT IS NOW A NORMAL PART OF HIS EXISTENCE." HE GESTURES, HIS RIGHT ARM POINTING DOWN A SMALL ALLEYWAY NO WIDER THAN FOUR FEET ACROSS. AS IT DEAD-ENDS, THERE BECOMES APPARENT ONE LAST RIGHT-HAND JOG.

SAM TAKES THE POINT. IT'S A FEW SECONDS BEFORE THEIR EYES ADJUST TO THE BAREST OF INDIRECT LIGHT. **THEN...**

THEY TAKE IN...

A SIGHT NEITHER MAN WILL SOON **FORGET.**

A BARELY AUDIBLE WHISPER ESCAPES DETECTIVE WILLIAMS' LIPS: "DEAR GOD...!"

THE CONSTRUCT IS A TWISTED MASS OF **RUBBISH**. SPLINTERED WOOD. BENT, RUSTED PIPE. MOLDY GARBAGE SO RIPE THAT THE LIQUIFIED POOLS HAVE **JELLED**. PIECES OF ALMOST ANY LITTLE THING...

...CLOTHING... BOTTLES... SYRINGES... NEWSPAPER... CHICKENWIRE...

...ALL **WOVEN** INTO A SPECIFIC FORM. BUT THE COMPONENT PART THAT DRAWS THE DETECTIVES' ATTENTION IS THE **HUMAN REMAINS**. SOME ARE STILL FLESHY, SOME HEAVILY DECOMPOSED, **ALL** ARE CRAWLING WITH **MAGGOTS**...

THOUSANDS OF MAGGOTS...

...GIVING THE ILLUSION THAT THE ENTIRE **FRAMEWORK** IS ALIVE... ALIVE AND **SOLID**... HOLDING THE SHAPE OF ITS OWN **FREE WILL**.

THEREFORE, THE THOUGHT OF WHAT IT APPEARS TO BE BECOMES EVEN **MORE** REPELLANT.

"JEEZ-US! IT'S SOME KINDA FRIGGIN' **CHAIR!"** BELLOWS SAM.

"A **THRONE**, TO BE MORE EXACT," SUGGESTS COG.

"THE HOMELESS ***REVERE*** THIS NEW WARRIOR. THEY HAVE TAKEN IT UPON THEMSELVES TO BUILD A SEAT OF ***PROMINENCE*** FOR THEIR ANOINTED KING.

"THE REMNANTS OF HUMAN SKELETONS ARE THOSE OF ***GANGSTERS*** OR ***DRUG PEDDLERS.*** ***SPAWN*** DID NOT END THEIR LIVES. ***THAT*** THEY DID TO ***THEMSELVES.***

"YOU SEE, THESE ALLEYS ARE A REPOSITORY FOR MAN'S ***EVIL DEEDS.*** DEPRIVED OF GOD'S LIGHT AS THEY ARE, THEY MAKE AN EXCELLENT DUMP SITE FOR ***MURDER VICTIMS.*** SPAWN HAS COLLECTED SOME OF THEM TO REMIND HIMSELF OF THE ***MADNESS*** HE NOW CALLS ***HOME.***

"NOW, BEFORE YOU PASS JUDGMENT," *EXPLAINS COG,* "CONSIDER HIS ***CIRCUMSTANCES.*** THIS IS A MAN WHO HAS LOST EVERYTHING HE HELD DEAR. ONE PERSON ***ESPECIALLY*** GAVE MEANING TO HIS LIFE, AND THAT WAS THE WOMAN HE'D ***MARRIED.***

"HELL KNEW THIS WHEN IT ***CHOSE*** HIM. SHE WAS HIS ***ACHILLES' HEEL.***

"***LOVE,*** AFTER ALL, HAS ***ALWAYS*** BEEN MANKIND'S GREATEST STRENGTH... AND MOST DAMNING ***WEAKNESS.***"

"AT THE TIME OF HIS DEATH, AL HEARD A ***VOICE*** WHICH CLAIMED IT WAS WILLING TO ***HELP.*** AL ASKED FOR ONE LAST CHANCE TO SEE HIS WIFE.

"THAT WISH... HIS ***LOVE...*** SEALED HIS FATE. THE VOICE SPOKE TO HIM FROM A ***BLACK VOID,*** AND AL COULDN'T SEE A FACE. IN HIS DESPAIR, HE ASSUMED IT WAS THE VOICE OF GOD. IT WAS NOT. RATHER, IT WAS ONE OF HELL'S ***DEVILS,*** TRICKING THE YOUNG MAN. AL WAS GRANTED HIS REQUEST, BUT ATTHE COST OF A FLOOD OF PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL ***TORTURES*** MEANT TO DEMORALIZE HIS SPIRIT.

"THOUGH, AS HE RECKONED TIME, HE'D BEEN KILLED ONLY A MOMENT EARLIER, ***FIVE LONG YEARS*** HAD PASSED AMONG THE LIVING. TIME ***ITSELF*** HAD BECOME A TORMENTER. HIS ***WIFE*** WAS NOW REMARRIED, TO AL'S ***BEST FRIEND...*** A MAN CAPABLE OF GIVING HER A CHILD. ***A CHILD!*** A MIRACLE SHE'D LONG THOUGHT ***IMPOSSIBLE.*** FOR A MAN AS ***VITAL*** AS AL HAD BEEN, THIS WAS A THOUGHT HE WOULD NOT EVEN CONSIDER... THAT THE CHILDLESS MARRIAGE WAS DUE TO A FAILURE ALL HIS ***OWN.***

"THERE WAS ONE OTHER INDIGNITY. WITH FIVE YEARS GONE BY SINCE HIS BURIAL, HIS ***OWN*** FAMILY, WHEN THEY THOUGHT OF HIM AT ALL, DID SO WITH ONLY PASSING FONDNESS."

"ADDING TO HIS ANGUISH WAS HIS ***APPEARANCE.*** HE RETURNED LOOKING AS HE HAD AT THE TIME OF HIS DEATH... AS A CHARRED ***CORPSE,*** THE FLESH NEARLY FLAYED AWAY BY A HIGH-POWERED BLOWTORCH.

"TRY TO IMAGINE HOW YOU'D FEEL WITH YOUR ***IDENTITY*** STRIPPED AWAY... YOUR HUMANITY ***LOST...*** TO FIND THAT THE PERSON FOR WHOM YOU RETURNED, THE ONE YOU DEARLY ***LOVE,*** TO BE NOT ONLY ***UNAWARE*** OF YOUR IDENTITY BUT REPELLED BY THAT WHICH YOU'VE ***BECOME! INSANITY*** WOULD NOT THEN SEEM SO FAR AWAY, DON'T YOU AGREE?

"OH YES -- THE CHARRED SKIN IS NOT THE ***END*** OF IT. HELL HAS PROVIDED NEW SKIN OF ITS ***OWN,*** A ***SUIT*** OF LIVING TISSUE WHICH ACTS BOTH AS PROTECTOR AND UNIFORM TO ITS HOST."

"HIS METAMORPHOSIS COMPLETE, THIS NEW RECRUIT MUST NOW ADAPT TO SURVIVE AND ***THRIVE*** IN THE AGE-OLD GAME BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL. RAISING THE STAKES ARE HIS ***OH***-SO-SLOWLY DEVELOPING SENSE OF HIS OWN INVOLVEMENT... AND THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE CONSEQUENCES FOR HIM SHOULD HE ***FAIL***, THE WORST BEING FORFEITURE OF HIS ***SOUL***."

LOOKING UP FROM HIS PAD FOR THE FIRST TIME, TWITCH ASKS TENTATIVELY, "ARE WE TO BELIEVE THIS SPAWN IS SOME TYPE OF ***PARANORMAL?***"

"***NO***," *COG ANSWERS FIRMLY.* "HIS TYPE ARE ORDINARY AMONG THEMSELVES... AND MORE COMMON AMONG US THAN YOU MAY ***THINK.***" *HE PAUSES FOR EFFECT. LOOKING UP, TWITCH OBSERVES... WHAT? A TRICK OF THE LIGHT? A SMIRK?*

COG CONTINUES: "WHAT HE'S ***BECOME***, AS I SAY, IS A ***TOOL***, FORGED FROM THE SUBSTANCE OF WHICH ***ALL*** HELL'S EARTHLY CHILDREN ARE MADE, CALLED ***NECROPLASM***. THIS INFERNAL MATTER MAKES HIM A CONSPICUOUS TARGET FOR ***HEAVEN'S*** AGENTS. OH YES, GOD'S WARRIORS AND HUNTERS ARE AMONG US TOO, STATIONED HERE WITH A PURPOSE. BY GOD'S LIGHT EACH HELLSPAWN, FOR THE FACT OF ITS EXISTENCE, IS CONDEMNED TO ***DEATH BY DECAPITATION.***"

"THE ODD ***FACT*** ABOUT THE DISPENSATION OF SOULS IS THAT IT ***ALTERNATES*** BETWEEN GOD AND SATAN, WITHOUT ANY STRICT ADHERENCE TO ACTUAL ***MERIT.*** THAT IS TO SAY, ***EITHER SIDE*** CAN PICK A DEPARTED SPIRIT THAT WOULD RIGHTLY GO TO THE ***OTHER.***

"YOU SEE? IT DOESN'T ***MATTER*** THAT THIS NEW SPAWN ISN'T TRULY EVIL, ONLY THAT HE ***SERVES*** THE SIDE OF DARKNESS. THAT'S ***ALL*** THAT MAKES HIM AN ENEMY OF HEAVEN. IT HAS NOTHING TO ***DO*** WITH GOOD OR EVIL... NOT TO BEGIN WITH.

"IT'S WHY ***ATTILA THE HUN*** RESIDES IN HEAVEN. ***HE*** NEVER SERVED GOD, AND HIS SOUL LEAVES THINGS TO BE DESIRED. HOWEVER, WITH THINGS AS THEY STAND, HE DID NOT BECOME THE SADISTIC DEMON THAT ***HELL*** WOULD HAVE MADE HIM INTO."

SAM FLICKS HIS CIGARETTE TO THE GROUND, CRUSHES THE BUTT OUT UNDERFOOT THEN RUBS HIS FOREHEAD. THE OVERWEIGHT DETECTIVE TRIES TO FORMULATE HIS NEXT QUESTION WITHOUT SOUNDING BEGUILED.

"SO HEAVEN AND HELL ARE HAVING SOME KIND OF ***DRAFT PICK*** WITH OUR SOULS. AND WHETHER WE'RE NAUGHTY OR NICE HAS NOTHING TO ***DO*** WITH ANYTHING? NOW ***THAT'S*** A CHEERY THOUGHT."

"YOU'RE NOT LISTENING, DETECTIVE," *COG ASSERTS SCORNFULLY.* "WHAT I'M SAYING IS THAT EACH ONE OF US, EVERY PERSON WHO EVER LIVED, IS CAPABLE OF ***EXTREME*** GOOD OR EXTREME EVIL.

"IT'S THE CHOICES WE MAKE THAT DETERMINE WHO WE ARE."

"SUCH BASIC MORAL DECISIONS ARE INFLUENCED IN TWO WAYS, THROUGH ***KNOWLEDGE*** AND ***ENVIRONMENT***. THE PULL OF THESE INFLUENCES WILL ***VARY*** THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES. WE START AT BIRTH ON EQUAL FOOTING BUT INCLINE TOWARD OUR OUTCOME AS WE GROW. SO, OUR LIKELY AFTERLIFE IS USUALLY DEFINED DURING OUR LIFETIME.

"WHY DID ***HITLER*** CRAVE TO IMPOSE HIS WILL THROUGH MANIPULATION AND ***FORCE*** WHILE ***MOTHER THERESA*** DEDICATED HER LIFE TO ***HELPING THE POOR?*** NO ONE COULD TELL YOU EXACTLY ***WHEN*** THEY PICKED THEIR ULTIMATE PATHS. BUT GIVEN, IF YOU WILL, THAT WE ALL HAVE THE SAME BASIC ***WIRING,*** THE HEART OF THE MATTER ***IS*** THE SEQUENCES OF EVENTS AND INFORMATION THAT MAKE US REACT. ***WE*** ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR WHO WE ARE. ***NO ONE ELSE.***

"THAT'S WHY HELL SELECTED ***THIS*** NEW SPAWN. AL HAD SHOWN A WIDE RANGE OF DEFINING POINTS. PATRIOT. KILLER. LOVER. ASSASSIN. ***ALL*** THESE THINGS HE COMMITTED HIMSELF TO, SELFLESSLY AND ***WELL,*** WHICH MADE HIM ATTRACTIVE TO ***BOTH*** SIDES.

"***SO.*** HE HAS ***RETURNED***. THROWN INTO THE FRYING PAN. HOW HE REACTS THIS TIME WILL HOLD ***TREMENDOUS*** SWAY OVER THE FINAL RESTING PLACE OF HIS SOUL.

"RIGHT NOW HE'S ***FAR*** FROM WINNING THE BATTLE, GENTLE MEN. EACH TIME HE GAINS A MOMENT'S ***RESPITE,*** ANOTHER GAUNTLET IS THROWN ***BEFORE*** HIM. WHEN HE ISN'T TRYING TO AVOID FORCES OF ***BIBLICAL*** PROPORTIONS HE'S COMING INTO CONTACT WITH ABOMINATIONS OF ***FLESH AND BLOOD...***

"...'SUPER-VILLAINS,' THEY'VE BEEN CALLED...

"... AND THEIR EFFECT HAS BEEN TO HELP UNBALANCE AL'S ***ALREADY*** UNSTABLE STATE OF MIND."

"HE SPENDS A GREAT DEAL OF TIME IN A CONFUSED STATE, BROODING. HIS INSTINCTS ARE ALL THAT'S LEFT TO HIM... ***SURVIVAL*** INSTINCTS. HIS ADULT LIFE WAS A SERIES OF DANGEROUS MISSIONS IN UNFAMILIAR PLACES. HE WAS TRAINED TO COUNT ON NONE BUT HIMSELF, TO BELIEVE AT GUT LEVEL THAT KILLING ***EQUALS*** SURVIVAL, AND ***APPROVAL***.

"***THIS*** IS WHAT HE CAN ***COUNT*** ON. IT MAKES SENSE TO THE POINT THAT HE WANTS TO THINK THINGS THROUGH. ***IT'S WHY THE DEVIL IS WINNING...*** WHY HE'S WON WITH ALL THE HELLSPAWN TO DATE. THEY FOUND IT'S EASIER TO SUCCUMB TO THOSE FEELING THAN TO LEARN, TO ***REDEFINE*** WHAT THEY'D BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO."

LOOKING DOWN AT HIS PET CAT, COGLIOSTRO STROKES THE FELINE WITH AGELESS HANDS, CALLOUSED AS IF FROM DECADES OF MANUAL LABOR. THEN, SLOWLY, HE TURNS AND STARTS OUT OF THE HIDDEN DEN AND BACK TOWARD THE OPEN STREET.

"COME, DETECTIVES," *COG GESTURES,* "WE'VE LINGERED IN HIS DOMAIN FOR TOO LONG. YOUR GOAL NOW IS TO BE INVITED AS ***GUESTS*** INTO SPAWN'S LAIR."

*AS THEY FOLLOW THE OLD MAN, A HUGE **SHADOW** PASSES OVERHEAD. COGLIOSTRO MAKES NOTE OF IT BUT SEES NO REASON TO MENTION IT TO THE LESS-OBSERVANT PAIR.*

GREY CLOUDS RUMBLE AS SAM AND TWITCH STAND NOW AT CURBSIDE WITH COG. THEY FEEL THE FIRST MISTING OF RAIN.

"I'VE STILL GOT TWO THINGS BUGGING ME," *SNARLS SAM AS HE LEANS INTO THE BEARDED MAN, COMING CLOSE ENOUGH TO ENFORCE AN INTENSE STARE.*

"FIRST, HOW THE HELL DO YOU ***KNOW*** ALL THIS?! AND SECOND, YOU ***STILL*** HAVEN'T EXPLAINED WHY SPAWN DROPPED KINCAID'S BODY IN OUR OFFICE.

"THAT LITTLE PRANK GOT US A SUSPENSION FROM THE POLICE FORCE. ONE THING LED TO ANOTHER AND THEN WE WERE OUT ON OUR ***BUTTS***. IT'S NOT SOMETHING I'M ABOUT TO FORGET."

"VERY WELL, DETECTIVE," *RESPONDS COG.* "YOUR FIRST QUESTION IS SIMPLE. AL IS NOT THE FIRST HUMAN CHOSEN TO BEAR THIS CURSE. ***OTHERS,*** LIKE ***MYSELF,*** HAVE BEEN TAINTED BY OUR PRIOR ACTIONS. I TOO HAVE HAD EXPERIENCE IN HELL'S ARMY."

"THE ANSWER TO YOUR SECOND QUESTION IS SOMETHING YOU MAY NOT WISH TO HEAR.

"EVERY KING NEEDS THE HELP OF LOYAL KNIGHTS. WHEN EACH NEW HELLSPAWN APPEARS BACK ON EARTH, THEY SEEK OUT THOSE WHO MAY HELP THEM IN ***THEIR*** QUEST TO RECAPTURE THEIR LOST ***HUMANITY.***

"HE HAS CHOSEN THE TWO OF YOU. THE BLOODY BODY OF BILLY KINCAID ESTABLISHED A ***BOND*** BETWEEN YOU... A DEATH FOREVER ***TYING*** EACH OF YOU TO THE OTHER.

"I SHOULD SAY AS WELL THAT SPAWN HIMSELF IS ***UNAWARE*** THAT HE'S PICKED YOU. HE WAS ACTING ON AN INSTINCTIVE LEVEL. REGARDLESS, YOU'VE BEEN MADE PARTNERS IN HIS CURSE. THIS HELL-SPAWN YOU SET OUT TO HUNT IS IN REALITY YOUR NEW ***MASTER.***

"YOU ARE TO ***HELP*** HIM METE OUT ***JUSTICE.***"

NEARBY, THE KING IS AGAIN IN PLACE IN HIS SANCTUARY. FRESH BLOOD STAINS HIS HANDS...

image

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I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU WEREN'T ADVERSE TO ANSWERING A FEW MORE QUESTIONS FOR US, COG.

SO YOU JUST RELAX. OUR OFFICE IS ONLY ABOUT FIFTEEN MINUTES AWAY.

I AGREE. THERE WAS NO NEED TO CAUSE A COM-MOTION IN A PUBLIC PLACE, ESPECIALLY IN LIGHT OF THIS OPTION.

EXACTLY.

I'M JUST LOOKING FOR A LITTLE CLARIFICATION ON THIS WHOLE "***WE NOW SERVE THE SPAWN***" SCENARIO.

I UNDERSTAND YOUR CONFUSION, DETECTIVE BURKE, EVEN THROUGH THE TRANSPARENT ***SARCASM***. BUT WHAT I TOLD YOU BACK IN THOSE ALLEYS IS ***FACT.**** WHETHER YOU CHOOSE TO ***BELIEVE*** ANY OF IT IS YOUR ***OWN*** DECISION.

IT DOESN'T MATTER EITHER WAY BECAUSE YOUR FATES HAVE BEEN INTERTWINED REGARDLESS.

*LAST ISSUE -- Tom.

YEAH. SURE. WHAT-EVER.

AND THAT MEANS TWITCH AND I ARE SUPPOSED TO *FORGET* THAT SPAWN COST US BOTH OUR JOBS...

...FORGET THE HUMILIATION OF BEING SUSPENDED FROM THE FORCE *BEFORE* THAT...?!

WELL, SORRY TO DISAPPOINT, *PAL*, BUT MY ROSE-COLORED GLASSES *BROKE* A *LONG* TIME AGO. I NOW SERVE THE *LAW*.

AGREED. BUT YOU WILL LEARN TO DO SO WITH SPAWN'S ASSISTANCE. YOU NEED NOT EXCLUDE ONE FOR THE OTHER.

Um, EXCUSE MY FORGETFULNESS HERE, COG, BUT TELL ME *AGAIN* WHY WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BECOME BOSOM BUDDIES WITH THIS COSTUMED *FREAK*?

BECAUSE, *LIKE* YOU, HE HAS LOST THE THINGS THAT MATTER MOST TO HIM. BUT, HE NEEDS HUMAN HANDS TO HELP HIM RECOVER HIS HUMANITY. *YOU AND YOUR PARTNER* ARE NOW THOSE HANDS.

IN TIME, ALL THIS WILL MAKE SENSE. FOR NOW, I'VE SAID ENOUGH.

C'MON. DON'T SELL YOURSELF *SHORT*. I'M BETTING YOU'VE GOT *PLENTY* TO SAY.

RIGHT, OLD MAN?

I SAID...

Unh?

SKEEEEE

CRIPES!

Creeeh!

TWITCH! JEEZ, MAN, WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE?!

I DON'T KNOW WHAT, SPECIFICALLY, YOU'RE REFERRING TO, SIR. IN FUTURE, THOUGH, A TINY WARNING BEFORE BRAKING AT 50 m.p.h AND DOING A 180 WOULD BE MUCH APPRECIATED.

WHERE IS HE?!!

HE WAS WITH US BEFORE WE ENTERED THE TUNNEL.

THEN WHAT? THE SHADOWS JUST SWALLOWED HIM?

DETECTIVE BURKE DOESN'T KNOW HOW CLOSE TO THE TRUTH HE'S JUST COME.

ELSEWHERE... IN THE DARKNESS OF RAT CITY...

...AL SIMMONS, LIKE SOME NERVOUS SCHOOL-BOY PREPARING FOR HIS FIRST PROM, WANTS TO MAKE SURE EVERYTHING LOOKS JUST RIGHT.

HE'S PRAYED FOR THIS SINCE HIS RETURN FROM THE GRAVE. TO BE NORMAL AGAIN. TO HAVE HIS LIFE BACK.

IT BEGINS WITH ONE SIMPLE TASK: LETTING HIS BELOVED WIFE, WANDA, KNOW THAT HE ISN'T DEAD.

THAT'S WHY HE'S NERVOUS. SO, TO CALM HIMSELF, HE STARTS TO HUM.

AGAIN AND AGAIN, THE SAME SONG PLAYS IN HIS MIND:

♪ So, you can tell by the way I use my walk... ♪

♪ I'm a woman's man, no time to talk. ♫

THE IRONY OF THOSE LYRICS ISN'T LOST TO HIM. BUT AS HE EXITS THE STAINED ALLEYS THAT HAVE HIDDEN HIS EXISTENCE, AL SIMMONS CASTS HIMSELF INTO THE PUBLIC WITH A SWAGGER THAT SCREAMS, "**WATCH OUT, WORLD!**"

THE WORLD OBLIGES.

JEEZ, LOUIE, GET A LOAD OF ***THIS*** GUY.

WHOA!

THEN, FOR THE NEXT HALF-BLOCK... STARES. SIDE GLANCES. THE ODD REMARK JUST UNDER THE BREATH.

AL THINKS IT'S DUE TO HIS STYLISH APPEARANCE.

A SLIGHT SMILE CREASES HIS FACE AS HE GETS TO THE REFRAIN...

♪ Stayin' Alive! Stayin' Alive! ♪

YO YO YO! CHECK THIS NEW HOMEY OUT. SAY, MISTER, I HOPE YOU AIN'T PLANNING TO GET *TOO* ROUGH WITH HER...!

PARDON?

I MEAN, FACE IT-- AIN'T NO WAY SOME SISTER'S GOING TO =snicker= GO ALL SWEET AND SOFT, YOU LOOKIN' LIKE THAT.

LIKE WHAT?

C'MON, BROTHER, STOP MESSING. YOU KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT. DON'T MATTER HOW NICE YOU WRAP UP A PIECE OF CRAP. IT'S STILL CRAP.

I HEARD ABOUT THAT AGENT ORANGE. STUFF REALLY MESSED UP A LOT OF PEOPLE.

IF IT'D BEEN ME, I'D SUE THE FEDS. ESPECIALLY IF THEY'D CRISPY-FRIED *MY* FACE LIKE THAT.

NO.

IT'S GONE.

NOT AGAIN. NOT MY FACE...!

AND DON'T TAKE THIS WRONG BUT YOU DEFINITELY ARE ONE STINKY MOTHER! =Hee hee= SO WHAT'S YOUR STORY? YOU SOME VIET NAM VET OR SOME-THING?

HA HA HA

YO, DUDE, DON'T CRY.

I'M SURE YOU CAN FIND YOURSELF SOME BLIND BITCH THAT'LL...

SALE

GHKK

SHUT UP!

YOU HEAR ME?! I'LL BREAK YOUR GODDAMN NECK RIGHT NOW!

INSTANTLY, THE REST OF THE GANG JUMPS TO THEIR FRIEND'S AID.

THIS TIME, HOWEVER, THEY DON'T STAND A CHANCE. LUCKILY FOR THEM, THE STRANGER UNEXPECTEDLY **ENDS** THE SKIRMISH AND SLUMPS BACK INTO THE EMBRACE OF THE **DARKNESS**...

YEAH?! WELL, SCREW YOU **TOO**, YOU **FREAK**.

...THE COLD SHADOWS AND ROTTING DISCARDS. THESE ALLEYWAYS HAVE BECOME AN ODD SORT OF **PRISON**-- ONE WHICH HE CAN **LEAVE** BUT NEVER **ESCAPE**.

NOT FAR AWAY, IN THE BOROUGH OF QUEENS, WANDA SITS WITH HER BLIND GRANDMOTHER, IDLY CHATTING AWAY THE EARLY MORNING.

MY OH MY! CYAN SURE DOES HAVE THE ENERGY OF THREE CHILDREN TODAY!

AND THAT'S WITHOUT A NAP YET.

I'LL SET HER DOWN AFTER LUNCH. THEN WE CAN HAVE A LITTLE QUIET TIME FOR OURSELVES.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME, WANDA. YOU KNOW I DON'T MIND. WE DO WHAT WE NEED TO DO WHEN THEY'RE THAT AGE.

THAT'S FOR SURE.

THE GROWN-UPS SMILE AS THEY TURN THEIR ATTENTION TO CYAN'S ROUGHHOUSING--

--DURING WHICH SHANNA, THE FAMILY DOG, MAKES A GALLANT LUNGE, TARGETING CYAN'S PRIZED SOOTHER NECKLACE.

GENEROUS IN VICTORY, SHANNA OFFERS THE NECKLACE, HOPING CYAN WILL KEEP THE GAME GOING. IT DOESN'T HAPPEN. INSTEAD, TIME STANDS STILL.

FOR A MOMENT, ALL SEEMS NORMAL.

THEN, A HIDDEN MEMORY IS TRIGGERED.

WAAK

THE NIGHTMARE HAS BEEN **RELEASED.**

THE LITTLE GIRL VENTS **INHUMAN** SOUNDS. WANDA HAS NEVER SEEN SUCH AN INTENSE DISPLAY FROM HER DAUGHTER.

SHANNA FLEES, SENSING SHE IS SOMEHOW IN TROUBLE... AND CYAN, LIKE A CRAZED BANSHEE, **PURSUES** HER.

CYAN!! YOU STOP THAT! RIGHT NOW!

FOR NEARLY THREE MINUTES WANDA TRIES TO CALM HER DAUGHTER. SHE'S SEEN HER THROW TANTRUMS BEFORE, BUT NONE REACHED ANY-WHERE **NEAR** THIS MAGNITUDE. THROUGH IT ALL, CYAN CAN ONLY REPEAT ONE THING:

NECKLACE! NECKLACE! ME WANT **NECKLACE!**

OKAY, SWEETIE. PLEASE JUST CALM DOWN.

SHE DOES. BUT ONLY **AFTER** THE OBJECT IS SECURELY IN HER TINY GRASP. THEN, CYAN SETTLES DOWN COMPLETELY, AS IF NOTHING HAD BEEN THE MATTER.

WANDA IS NOT ABLE TO UNDERSTAND **WHAT** JUST HAPPENED. IS CYAN TIRED? HUNGRY? THOUGH THE SOOTHER HAS BEEN IMPORTANT TO CYAN THE PAST FEW WEEKS -- WITH HER WHILE SLEEPING, PLAYING AND BATHING -- IT DOESN'T JUSTIFY HER OUTBURST.

IN **FACT,** CYAN'S ATTACHMENT IS NOT TO THE SOOTHER BUT TO THE **SHOELACE** STRUNG THROUGH IT... ITSELF REMARKABLE BECAUSE IT HAD LAST BEEN USED TO BIND HER DEAD HUSBAND'S FACE AS IT HEALED. *

NOW, IT'S WHAT KEEPS CYAN'S UNWANTED **MEMORIES** IN CHECK.

*ISSUE 50 -- Tom.

BECAUSE, IN SPITE OF ALL THE MADNESS GOES ON AROUND HIM...

UNFORTUNATELY, **OTHERS** LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE SUFFERING CANNOT BE SO EASILY VANQUISHED.

SUCH IS THE CURSE OF THIS NEW HELLSPAWN. HE IS FOREVER TRYING TO RESOLVE HIS PERSONAL CONFLICTS BUT HE ENDS UP DIGGING HIMSELF IN DEEPER.

...IT IS NEITHER HEAVEN **NOR** HELL THAT KEEPS HIM FROM REGAINING HIS HUMANITY.

THIS TRUTH IS SOMETHING HE'S NOT WILLING TO CONCEDE. SO, **ANGER** FILLS THIS RE-ANIMATED CORPSE-- NOW SPILLING OVER WITH SUCH INTENSITY THAT DESTRUCTION OF HIS SURROUNDINGS IS THE MOST **SENSIBLE** COURSE OF ACTION.

THIS IS EXACTLY THE WAY HELL **WANTS** HIM TO BE.

...HOW THEY NEED HIM TO BE.

I'M SICK OF YOU CROWDING ME ALL THE TIME, COG. SO DO US BOTH A FAVOR AND LEAVE.

NOW!

WHY? SO YOU CAN DEMOLISH EVERYTHING, THEN WALLOW IN SELF-PITY? *LEARN* FROM YOUR MISTAKES, DAMN IT!

QUESTION WHAT'S HAPPENING. THEN, PERHAPS YOU'LL FIND THE PURPOSE YOU'RE TRULY MEANT TO FULFILL. UNTIL YOU ACQUIRE THE PROPER KNOWLEDGE, HELL WILL *ALWAYS* HAVE THE UPPER HAND.

BE CAREFUL, AL. YOU'RE MAKING THIS *FAR* TOO EASY FOR MALEBOLGIA.

WHICH HE'S *COUNTING* ON.

THEN **LET** IT! I DON'T HAVE THE STRENGTH ANYMORE. THE **FIGHT** ISN'T IN ME.

LIAR!

IF YOU DIDN'T CARE... IF NONE OF THIS MATTERED TO YOU... THEN YOU WOULDN'T BE SO ***PISSED OFF***. WELL, TOO BAD, AL, BUT IT *ALL* PIVOTS ON YOU, AND YOU'RE LETTING YOUR PASSIONS DICTATE HOW EACH TEST WILL END.

THIS TIME YOU CHOSE ***REVENGE***.* THAT'S NOW COST YOU A BRIEF CHANCE WITH YOUR WIFE.

*ISSUE 64 -- Tom.

MAYBE YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOUR HUMAN FACE WOULDN'T LAST. BY NOW YOU'RE SMART ENOUGH TO REALIZE ***NOTHING*** IS AS IT APPEARS.

THOUGH YOU SET OUT WITH THE BEST OF INTENTIONS, YOU SPENT PRECIOUS TIME WITH AN ENEMY, INSTEAD OF WHERE IT MATTERED TO YOU THE MOST.

HOW WAS I SUPPOSED TO **KNOW?!** I THOUGHT I COULD BE A MAN AGAIN.

YOU CAN BE. BUT NOT YOUR WAY. YOUR FACE ROTTED BECAUSE YOUR BODY AND UNIFORM ***REJECTED*** IT.

SEE, YOU ***BELONG*** IN THESE ALLEYS... HIDDEN AWAY... AND NOT AS BAD OFF AS IT APPEARS. WITHIN THESE SHADOWS LIE SOME OF THE SECRETS THAT CAN HELP RESTORE YOUR HUMANITY.

YOU WERE PLACED HERE BY GOD. HELL MAY HAVE CHOSEN YOU BUT HEAVEN HAD THE CALL TO LOCATE YOU WHEREVER ON EARTH THEY WANTED.

HAVE NO DOUBT-- HEAVEN HAS A HAND IN ALL THIS TOO... AND THEY SELECTED THIS PLACE FOR A ***REASON.***

I DON'T **CARE.** CAN'T YOU **GET** THAT THROUGH YOUR **HEAD?**

I JUST WANTED TO SEE MY WIFE! THAT'S ALL!

I DIDN'T ASK TO LIVE IN THIS GODDAMN NIGHTMARE-- AND I CAN'T DO ANY-THING ABOUT IT! NOT EVEN KILL MYSELF!

I CAN'T DIE! DON'T YOU UNDER-STAND?!

I CAN'T DIE!

I CAN'T DIE!!

WE ALL HAVE OUR CROSSES TO BEAR.

BUT IF IT'S ***REDEMPTION*** YOU SEEK, THEN ***LEARN!*** A SECOND CHANCE HAS BEEN GIVEN TO YOU. THE QUEST ISN'T TO BECOME A ***MAN*** AGAIN...

... BUT TO BECOME ***BETTER*** THAN YOU WERE BEFORE.

"THAT'S HOW YOU WILL FINALLY BE FREE."

OTHERWISE, YOU WILL LANGUISH IN HELL'S TRAP, TRUSTING NO ONE AND LIVING OUT A PATHETIC EXISTENCE SURROUNDED WITH ***NOTHING*** BUT EVIL.

IN A FINE DINER, TERRY FITZGERALD IS FINISHING A LATE BUSINESS MEETING.

Um, PARDON ME, BUT COULD WE PLEASE GET THE BILL...? THANKS!

SO OKAY, I'LL TALK YOUR PROPOSAL OVER WITH JIMMY ON WEDNESDAY MORNING WHEN HE

BREEP

HELLO?

THIS IS WANDA. SOMETHING WEIRD HAPPENED TO CYAN TODAY THAT I THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT.

EXCUSE ME A MINUTE, DOUG.

WANDA RECOUNTS THE DETAILS OF THEIR DAUGHTER'S STRANGE BEHAVIOR--NOT BECAUSE SHE EXPECTS ANY **ANSWERS** BUT BECAUSE SHE KNOWS TERRY WOULD WANT TO BE **TOLD**.

SEE YOU NEXT WEEK.

YOU BET.

TERRY.

:Pssst!

OVER HERE.

Unh?

HOW'D YOU KNOW MY--*AL?!* IS THAT YOU?

YOUR FACE--! WHERE'D IT GO?

IT DOESN'T MATTER. NOT ANYMORE. I THOUGHT THINGS WOULD LAST A BIT LONGER. HOPED THINGS WOULD BE DIFFERENT. BUT THEY AREN'T.

NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRY TO CHANGE WHAT I'VE BECOME, THIS **CURSE**, THESE **POWERS**-- I CAN'T **BEAT** IT. THE SOONER I ACCEPT IT, THE BETTER WE'LL **ALL** BE.

YOU'RE NOT MAKING ANY SENSE.

WHAT I'M TRYING TO SAY IS, I'M WILLING TO MAKE A GO OF IT WITH YOU AGAIN-- GO THROUGH WITH THE PLANS WE HAD TO BRING **WYNN** TO HIS POLITICAL **KNEES**. IF WE DISRUPT ENOUGH OF HIS FOREIGN STRONG-HOLDS, HIS ALLIES WILL TURN ON HIM.

WHAT ABOUT WANDA?

SHE CAN'T SEE ME LIKE THIS OR KNOW I'M EVEN ALIVE. **YOU** KEEP HER HAPPY FOR NOW.

WHAT?

THAT'S IT! YOU JUST WANT ME TO FORGET ***EVERY***THING AND WAIT AROUND UNTIL YOU THINK SHE'S ***READY*** FOR ***YOU***. WELL, YOU CAN ***GO TO HELL***. DO YOU ***HEAR*** ME?!

I DON'T LIKE BEING ***THREATENED***. YOU REMEMBER ***DOING*** THAT? ***YOU SAID WE WERE ENEMIES!*** * AND HERE I USED TO THINK WE WERE ***FRIENDS***. BUT YOU'RE ***NOTHING*** LIKE THE AL SIMMONS THAT ***I*** KNEW. YOU WANT AN ***END*** TO THIS WAR, ***FINE!*** LET'S ***END*** IT!

*ISSUE 63 -- DAN.

YOU PHONE WANDA RIGHT NOW! TELL HER YOU'RE BACK, AND THAT SHE CAN ONLY HAVE *ONE* OF US!

I'M TIRED OF PLAYING YOUR FRIGGIN' WAITING GAME.

HERE!

OKAY THEN, I'LL DIAL HER MYSELF.

bip bip beep boop

TALK TO HER, DAMMIT! BE A MAN.

IF SHE'S GOING TO REJECT ME, I WANT TO KNOW TODAY...!

HELLO? *HELLO?*

TERRY, I-- I'M SORRY.

YEAH, WELL, I'M *NOT.*

SINCE YOU'VE BEEN BACK, MY LIFE HAS BEEN HELL TOO. WELCOME TO THE CLUB.

HELLO? TERRY, IS THAT YOU?

Um, SORRY ABOUT THAT, SWEETHEART, I HAD A LITTLE PROBLEM HERE AT THE OFFICE. ANYWAY, I THOUGHT I'D LEAVE WORK ***EARLY*** TODAY-- TAKE YOU AND CYAN OUT FOR SOME ***FUN***.

*WE'D BOTH **LOVE** THAT.*

LATE THAT SAME NIGHT, **THEY** BEGIN TO CRAWL. THE **CHILDREN OF DARKNESS.** BUGS AND BEASTS THAT SERVE THOSE TOUCHED BY HELL.

POURING FROM EVERY POSSIBLE CRACK, THEY **ENGULF** THE HELLSPAWN. HE'S THEIR NEW MASTER AND THEY SENSE HIS NEEDS. HIS **PAIN.**

BEING DRAPED IN THEIR EVIL WILL MAKE HIM **STRONG** AGAIN, SO THE FLOOD CONTINUES. AL SIMMONS BEGINS TO FEEL HIMSELF **DROWNING** IN A BLACK ABYSS, PULLED THERE BY HIS OWN AURA OF SIN.

THEN IT **VANISHES.**

HE'S BEEN DREAMING. NIGHTMARE THOUGHTS OF THE DAMNED.

AND WITH THAT, A WAVE OF DIZZINESS DRAGS HIM UNDER.

FOR A BRIEF MOMENT IT APPEARS HE IS **RUNNING**. THAT'S ONLY BECAUSE HE CAN'T CATCH UP TO HIS LOST BALANCE.

KRASH!

UNTIL SOMETHING STOPS HIM.

HE GASPS THROUGH CHARRED LUNGS NOW FORMED OF AN INDESCRIBABLE SUB-STANCE. TALONED HANDS TRY TO LOCK ONTO **ANYTHING** SOLID AND STABLE.

HE **CAN'T**. HIS NEXT ATTEMPT TO **WALK** FAILS AFTER ONLY A FEW YARDS.

YAAA!

THE FORCE OF HIS FALL IS PARTIALLY CUSHIONED BY A DISHEVELED HOME-LESS MAN, HIMSELF UNABLE TO STAND UPRIGHT...

...THOUGH, IN HIS CASE, AS THE RESULT OF A **DRINKING BINGE**.

MY GOD, I'VE BEEN HIT, DID YOU SEE?! THAT TRUCK JUST RAN OVER MY LEG! DIDN'T SLOW DOWN OR NOTHING! GET HIS LICENSE, SOMEONE! IT'S A HIT 'N' RUN, I'VE BEEN CRIPPLED! GET AN AMBULANCE PLEEEASE!

EVENTUALLY, THE FOG LIFTS FROM SPAWN'S BRAIN, AND HE MEANDERS BACK TO HIS SANCTUARY--

--HIS POSTURE SUGGESTING MINIMAL REMORSE FOR THE DAMAGE HIS 400-lb. BODY MAY HAVE CAUSED.

I'M GONNA BE AN AMPUTEEE!

HE NEEDS TIME, SPACE. TO THINK HAS HE GONE CRAZY? WAS THIS JUST AN ISOLATED INCIDENT?

DOES HE HAVE ANY CONTROL AT ALL, OR IS HE JUST FALLING FURTHER INTO THE SUFFOCATING EMBRACE OF SIN?

AS HE RUBS HIS TEMPLE, HE FEELS THE BIZARRE NAUSEA PASSING, AND RELIEVED THAT IT WAS JUST SOME SADISTIC, SHORT-TERM VIRUS.

THE TINY CREATURE CRAWLING OUT OF HIS PERIPHERAL SAYS OTHERWISE.

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DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN®

CAPULLO '97

McFARLANE

FOR THE PAST HALF-DAY, THE EASTERN SEABOARD HAS BRACED ITSELF AGAINST A **TORRENT** OF RAINFALL. TO EVERYONE'S RELIEF IT FINALLY APPEARS TO HAVE **SUBSIDED.** THE BLACKENED **SKIES** LINGER ON, THOUGH-- THE CACOPHONOUS RUMBLING STILL ANNOUNCING THE SPORADIC **LIGHTNING** THAT SPIKES EARTHWARD.

OCCASIONALLY, ONE SUCH ELECTRICAL FORK, STRIKING RADOMLY, WILL HIT A **PARTICULARLY** SENSITIVE MANMADE CONSTRUCT. **INSTANTLY,** A GRID PATTERN OF CITY DWELLERS IS **DEPRIVED** OF THEIR LIGHTS AND APPLIANCES.

Awh. HERE IT IS.

I **FOUND** IT, SIR! LET ME JUST MAKE SURE THE BATTERIES ARE...

...
...

Um, SIR...? YOU DIDN'T PICK UP THOSE NEW BATTERIES LIKE I ASKED, DID YOU?

I'VE BEEN BUSY.

AS HAVE WE ALL. SO, THAT MEANS NONE OF THE OTHER ITEMS ON THE LIST WERE PROCURED THEN, EITHER.

TOMORROW. I'LL MAKE IT A PRIORITY.

TONIGHT I JUST WANT TO HUNT DOWN THAT **COGLIOSTRO** DUDE. ASK HIM WHY HE PULLED THAT **DISAPPEAR-ING ACT** ON US THE OTHER NIGHT. *

*LAST ISSUE -- Tom.

SOME-THING TELLS ME THAT HE...?!

YAHOO! WE'RE BACK IN BUSINESS!

SIR? YOU OKAY? IS EVERYTHING COMING *OUT* ALL RIGHT? NEED MORE KETCHUP?

HEE HEE

OH, GROW UP, TWITCH.

NOT MANY PEOPLE HAVE THE SKILL TO *EAT* A LOAF AND *PINCH* ONE AT THE SAME TIME.

BURP!

PLOP

VERY IMPRESSIVE, SIR.

BUT I FEEL THAT OUR TIME MIGHT BE BETTER SPENT OVER AT THE ASSESSOR'S OFFICE. IF WE CAN GET A DETAILED MAP THAT WILL SHOW US EVERY WAY IN AND OUT OF THOSE ALLEYWAYS--

--WE CAN BEGIN TO SET OUR TRAP FOR SPAWN.

WHAT ABOUT COG? HOW DO WE KNOW HE'S NOT IN *CAHOOTS* WITH SPAWN?

WE DON'T. BUT IF WE'RE CLEVER, MAYBE WE NAB BOTH OF THEM FOR QUESTIONING.

YEAH, OKAY. JUST LET ME CLEAN UP MY LITTLE MESS HERE.

HEY! IS THIS OUR LAST ROLL OF TOILET PAPER?

IT IS.

THAT WAS ALSO ON YOUR LIST.

WHATEVER.

Y'KNOW, I'M SURPRISED THE GENERATOR'S KICKED IN SO WELL. YOU WERE BEGINNING TO MAKE ME BELIEVE THIS PLACE WAS JUST A MONEY PIT.

NO COMMENT.

CLICK CLICK

HEY! YOU HEAR THAT? IT'S THE ELEVATOR MOVING!

Oh NO! THAT'S MRS. BYRD. SHE HAS A NINE O'CLOCK APPOINTMENT.

CRIPES! NOT THAT HAG!

YOU TAKE THIS ONE, TWITCH. I CAN'T HANDLE HER.

DETECTIVES

ZOK

I'LL HIDE IN THE BATHROOM WHILE YOU TAKE HER INTO THE OTHER ROOM. THEN I'LL SNEAK OUT. CAPICE?

ZOK

HELLO, MRS. BYRD. HOW ARE YOU THIS FINE EVENING?

WHAT'S SO FINE ABOUT IT?

SO IT BEGINS. ENTER, THE BELLIGERANT CLIENT WITH A SHAM OF A CASE WHO'S LOOKING FOR NOTHING MORE THAN SOME ATTENTION. THOUGH THE TWO DETECTIVES HAVE THEIR OWN PROBLEMS, SHE IS SOMETHING THEY HAVE RARELY ENCOUNTERED:

A PAYING CUSTOMER.

...THEN THE ALIENS... THE GREYS, YOU KNOW,.. TRIED ANOTHER OF THEIR WEIRD, KINKY EXPERIMENTS ON ME BEFORE DROPPING ME BACK IN MY BEDROOM. NOTHING WAS DISTURBED EXCEPT THE PAJAMAS I WAS WEARING... WELL, AND MYSELF, OF COURSE. THOSE WERE TURNED INSIDE-OUT. THE PAJAMAS.

SO, WHAT'RE YOU GOING TO DO?

I HAVE AN IDEA.

201 DETECTIVE

A FEW MOMENTS LATER...

HEY CHUBBY!

NOK NOK

C'MON OUT! YOUR PAL SAID YOU WANTED TO HANDLE THIS WHILE HE STEPPED OUT. SAID YOU HAD ALL NIGHT FOR ME.

:sigh: WHAT AM I DOING WITH MY LIFE--?

I THINK TWITCH IS A DEAD MAN.

WINTER'S BITING COLD IS JUST A FEW WEEKS AWAY. THE RAINFALL, THOUGH SUBSIDED, HAS SATURATED THE NIGHT AIR.

THOSE WHO HUDDLE FOR REFUGE AND WARMTH 'GAINST THESE TIME-RAVAGED WALLS FIND IMAGINITIVE WAYS TO PASS ANOTHER PUNISHING EVENING.

JEEZ! BOOTSY, LOOKIT *THAT*. I THINK HE'S GOING TO BREAK YOUR RECORD.

UNBELIEVABLE! I HAVEN'T SEEN SOMETHING LIKE THAT SINCE 'ONE-ARM' JANNEY BACK IN '78.

HE GESTURES FOR A MOMENT OF SILENCE. THE PERFORMANCE IS ABOUT TO ENTER ITS CLIMAX.

THIPK

THANK YOU. THANK YOU. JUST MAKE SURE YOU SPREAD THE WORD... I'LL TAKE ON ALL CHALLENGERS FOR A PACK OF CIGARETTES.

BIG DEAL. IT DON'T CHANGE THE FACT YOU'RE STILL A PRICK.

WHY DON'T YOU GIVE IT A REST, JOHNNY. HE'S SORRY HE CAN'T BE A *PERFECT* SLOB LIKE YOU.

YOU'LL SHUT YOUR MOUTH IF YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOU, BOBBY.

I DON'T TAKE MUCH COMFORT IN KNOWING I'VE GOT TO ENDURE ANOTHER FOUR MONTHS OF FREEZING.

SEE, THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOU AND ME IS YOU'VE *ACCEPTED* THIS LIFE -- RUNNING AROUND SCRAPING FOR EVERY CRUMB. WELL, UNLIKE YOU, *I* EXPECT TO GET OUT OF HERE.

YOU GUYS TREAT THIS LIKE A *LIFE SENTENCE.*

WE'RE ALL HERE FOR A PURPOSE, JOHN. *INCLUDING* YOU. SO GET OFF YOUR HIGH HORSE.

FINE, BUT IT DON'T MEAN WE SHOULD SCURRY AROUND, LIKE RATS AFRAID OF EVERY SHADOW, BECAUSE YOUR PAL SPAWN KEEPS BRINGING IN UNWANTED VISITORS.

AND WE'RE THE ONES CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE. SO YOU TELL ME, WHAT THE CHRIST IS HIS PURPOSE HERE?

...OTHER THAN GIVING YOU SOMEONE TO BROWN-NOSE.

HONESTLY? I DON'T KNOW. BUT I LEARNED LONG AGO NOT TO QUESTION THE FATE GOD HAS CHOSEN FOR EACH OF US.

HE'S RIGHT.

IF YOU THINK WE'RE ALL HAPPY WITH WHERE WE ARE, YOU'RE AN IDIOT. BUT THAT DON'T MEAN WE'RE GONNA STOP BELIEVING IN THINGS. AND RIGHT NOW I BELIEVE WE NEED SPAWN, AND HE NEEDS US. BUT ALL THAT IS STILL NOTHING COMPARED TO THE POWER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

HE DIDN'T HAVE NOTHING EITHER. AND LOOK WHAT HE BECAME. SO, IF NOTHING ELSE, THAT GIVES ME HOPE. FOR NOW, THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH.

EXCELLENT, JULIO.

BUT SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE WE NEED TO PUT A LITTLE OF OUR FAITH INTO PRACTICE. LIKE '*DO UNTO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD HAVE THEM DO UNTO YOU.*'

NOW WHERE IS THE COAT YOU STOLE FROM ME THURSDAY?

HERE, GUYS, LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT GIVES *ME* HOPE.

WHAT IS IT?

THE ONLY THING I'VE GOT LEFT FROM MY PAST. MY LITTLE GIRL GAVE IT TO ME ABOUT FIFTEEN YEARS AGO. IT'S THE LAST TIME I TALKED TO MY LITTLE SUZIE.

JEEZ, SHE'S GOTTA BE ALMOST 35 YEARS OLD NOW.

WHEN HER MOM DIED FROM CANCER WE BOTH FELL APART. I WASN'T STRONG ENOUGH FOR HER -- I STARTED DRINKING. SUZIE GOT INTO DRUGS. BUT THEN SHE *BROKE* HER DRUG DEPENDENCY, FOUND A WAY TO CARRY ON.

WHEN SHE TRACKED ME DOWN I WAS ALREADY ON THE STREETS. HAD LOST EVERYTHING TO MY ALCOHOLISM. SHE TOLD ME, "*THIS IS A REMINDER OF WHAT'S WAITING IF YOU WANT IT.*"

SO SHE TOOK THE TIME TO FIND YOU IN THE ALLEYS SO SHE COULD TELL YOU SHE'D BE THERE IF YOU GOT YOUR LIFE TOGETHER.

IT WAS MORE THAN THAT.

I BET SHE WAS A *BELIEVER,* WASN'T SHE. WELL, YOU CAN WASTE THIS TIME ON EARTH BUT THERE'S STILL A CHANCE TO SEE HER... *AND* YOUR WIFE... IN HEAVEN. FOREVER.

YOU MUST BECOME BORN AGAIN. IT'S YOUR ONLY HOPE. ACCEPT JESUS INTO YOUR HEART.

YEAH.

SO WHAT'RE YOU TRYING TO SAY, THAT THOSE WHO DON'T THINK LIKE ***YOU*** AIN'T MAKIN' IT TO THE PEARLY GATES?

MAYBE I SHOULD DO MORE CRACK AND ACID. THEN I'D BE ***JUST LIKE*** YOU. MAYBE ***THEN*** YOUR GOD WOULD LIKE ME BETTER.

IT'S NOT OUR ***DEEDS*** THAT GET US INTO THE LORD'S KINGDOM, BUT WHETHER YOU EMBRACE JESUS CHRIST AS YOUR SAVIOR.

WHAT A LOAD OF ***CRAP!***

AND WHY IS THAT?

YOU MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS, SPOOK.

I ASKED YOU A QUESTION!

FINE.

YOU KNOW WHAT MAKES ME PUKE ABOUT RELIGION? IT'S THE SEPARATION. IF YOU AIN'T GOOD ENOUGH, OR YOU DON'T FOLLOW A CERTAIN SET OF RULES, THEN... ***BOOM!*** YOU'RE DONE. BANISHED INTO AN ETERNAL HELL...

... ONE CONSIDERED TO BE THE WORST POSSIBLE FATE A HUMAN COULD HAVE IMPOSED ON HIM. OR AT LEAST THE MOST HORRIBLE THINGS THEM DAMNED PROPHETS COULD THINK OF.

SEE, I THINK PEOPLE WHO PRAY TO UNSEEN FORCES ARE ***STUPID***. THAT'S IT. JUST PLAIN OLD IGNORANT. BUT BELIEVERS, THEY GO ***WAY*** BEYOND THAT. THEY ACCEPT THAT THEIR GOD WILL TORTURE AND PUNISH A SOUL IN WAYS TO HORRIBLE TO IMAGINE.

IT'D BE LIKE ME THINKING OF THE WORST THING I COULD COME UP WITH. LIKE, SAY, SOMEONE'S GRANDMA GETTING SCREWED BY AN ELEPHANT WHILE HAVING POKERS SHOVED IN HER EYES. BUT I WOULDN'T DO THAT. AND I AIN'T A FRACTION AS LOVING AS THEIR SUPPOSED GOD.

Oh, AND THE LAST TIME I CHECKED, GOD'S THE ONE WHO DISCRIMINATES. IF YA DON'T BEND A KNEE THEN IT'S OFF TO SATAN YA GO. ***BUT,*** I'VE YET TO HEAR THE ***DEVIL*** REJECT ANY-ONE. NEVER HEARD HIM SAY, *"I'M SORRY, SIR, BUT IT APPEARS YOU'RE TOO GOOD FOR US."* NOPE! HIS DOOR IS OPEN TO ANY-ONE. ANYTIME. HE DOESN'T CARE WHO OR WHAT YOU ARE. EVERYONE IS ACCEPTED. SEEMS LIKE IT'S THE DEVIL WHO MIGHT BE A LITTLE MORE GENEROUS WITH HIS JUDGEMENT.

SO NOW WHAT DO YOU THINK, SPAWN?

AL STANDS FOR A MOMENT, STRUGGLING TO DECIDE IF HE SHOULD JOIN THIS ENDLESS DEBATE.

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I BELIEVED, JUST LIKE YOU DID, THAT LIFE IS JUST ABOUT TODAY. BUT THAT CHANGED WHEN THEY TURNED ME INTO WHAT I AM NOW.

I GUARANTEE YOU, THERE **IS** GOOD AND EVIL, AND EACH TAKES MANY FORMS, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN THEY RESEMBLE ANYTHING THE BIBLE TEACHES US.

SO IN A WAY, YOU'RE BOTH WRONG.

THE ANSWER, AS FAR AS I CAN TELL, LIES SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE BLACK AND WHITE STEREOTYPES WE'VE BEEN TAUGHT ABOUT HEAVEN AND HELL.

IT'S A **GREY** AREA THAT EVERYTHING LIVES IN... WHERE NEITHER GOD NOR SATAN IS TRULY GOOD OR EVIL. AND THAT'S WHAT MAKES IT ALL THE MORE CHILLING.

NOT BECAUSE THEY CONTROL US, BUT BECAUSE THEY **DON'T**. NOT REALLY. THESE OUTSIDE FORCES GIVE US OPTIONS, BUT THEY DON'T DECIDE. **WE** DO. WE CREATE OUR OWN JUDGEMENT DAYS.

LOOK, I DON'T PROFESS TO KNOW WHAT YOU ARE OR WHERE YOU CAME FROM, BUT YOU AREN'T RIGHT IN THE HEAD.

NONE OF YOU ARE!

SO CLING TO YOUR USELESS DELUSIONS OF WHY WE'RE ALL STUCK IN THIS CESSPOOL. KEEP TELLING YOURSELVES THERE'S SOME DEEPER MEANING. I LIKE TO DEAL WITH *REALITY.*

SLAP

GET OUTTA MY WAY, BOBBY...

...YOU'RE TAKING UP SPACE.

KISSH

NO. PLEASE, NOT THIS. GOD-DAMN YOU, JOHN! LOOK WHAT YOU'VE *DONE!*

MY CRYSTAL... YOU... YOU... I'M SORRY, SUZIE, IT WASN'T MY FAULT.

LIKE A CHILD WHO'S SEEN HIS FAVORITE TOY BREAK RIGHT BEFORE HIS EYES, BOBBY WEEPS... BUT IN NEAR SILENCE, TO HIDE HIS DEEP LOSS FROM THE OTHERS.

SPAWN STARES AT THIS MAN WHOSE LIFE ITSELF IS SHATTERED AS HE TRIES DESPERATELY TO GATHER THE BROKEN PIECES OF PRECIOUS GLASS.

YOU GOING TO BE OKAY, BOBBY?

ALWAYS AM.

THAT'S THE GOOD THING ABOUT WHERE WE'RE AT. IT'S TOUGH TO GO ANY LOWER 'CAUSE AS FAR AS THE WORLD'S CONCERNED WE'RE ALREADY AT THE BOTTOM.

WHO CARES WHAT I FEEL.

WILL YOU LISTEN TO YOURSELF?! WHAT'CHA GOING TO DO NOW? SIT THERE FEELING SORRY FOR YOURSELF? WELL, WHY DON'T YOU JUST END YOUR MISERY. ***KILL YOURSELF.*** THEN YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT BEING A LOSER NO MORE.

BUT YOU WON'T. KNOW WHY? 'CAUSE YOU'RE LIKE ME THAT WAY. YOU'RE AFRAID. AND YOU'RE HOLDING OUT FOR THE ONE FAINT HOPE WE ALL HAVE... THAT A ***MIRACLE*** WILL HAPPEN...

...TURNING US BACK INTO REAL PEOPLE AGAIN.

NOT FAR AWAY...

HOPE YOU BOYS ARE READY FOR A LITTLE ACTION TONIGHT, 'CAUSE I'M IN A PISSY MOOD.

GOOD.

I HEAR GINO AND HIS BOYS ARE SWEEPING THE 1400 BLOCK TONIGHT FOR THEIR PROTECTION MONEY.

WHICH MEANS THE RED LIGHT DISTRICT IS FLOATING WITH NOTHING BUT AMATEURS.

SOUNDS LIKE AN INVITATION.

EXACTLY.

WE KNOCK OVER THE PAWN SHOP AFTER CLOSING, THEN SERVE UP ONE OF OUR RELIGIOUS BRETHREN AS A SCAPEGOAT A COUPLE DAYS LATER. THE POOR SAP WILL BE WEARING CEMENT BOOTS BEFORE THE WOPS GET WIND OF THIS.

72 HOURS OF PARTIAL BLISS IN RETURN FOR A NAMELESS STRANGER'S LIFE.

SACRIFICING THEIR OWN. IT'S A QUICK, CLEAN SCAM-- A HOMELESS INNOCENT BEING PUNISHED FOR SINS COMMITTED BY OTHER DERELICTS. ALL FOR HEISTED MONEY THAT WILL LAST THEM BARELY THREE DAYS.

NOW I SEE WHY YOU DON'T WANT TO ANSWER TO A HIGHER POWER. IT JUST MAKES IT EASIER FOR YOU TO MAKE UP YOUR OWN RULES. IS THAT IT, JOHNNY?

YOU GAVE A HELLUVA SPEECH BACK THERE.

?

ABOUT NOT WANTING TO CONDEMN PEOPLE TO A LIVING HELL. BUT CONDEMNING THEM TO DEATH, I GUESS THAT'S OKAY, unh?

IS THAT RIGHT. SO TELL ME, WHY'D *YOU* PICK BEING SOME FRIGGIN' *FREAK* IN A *FAGGOT* COSTUME?

LIKE I SAID, WE CHOOSE WHAT WE BECOME.

THAT SUPPOSED TO MAKE YOU *BETTER* THAN US?

MAYBE YOU'VE TRICKED SOME OF THOSE FOOLS, BUT THERE'S A FAR GREATER SPLIT BETWEEN THOSE WHO WANT YOU HERE AND THOSE WHO DON'T THAN YOU CAN POSSIBLY IMAGINE.

THAT'S NOT MY PROBLEM.

SEE, TOUGH GUY, WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT, THEY EXPECT MY HELP. SOME EVEN BELIEVE I'M SOME KIND OF GUARDIAN ANGEL. WELL, MY OWN LIFE MAY BE COMPLETELY SCREWED UP BUT I'M NOT WILLING TO ABANDON THOSE I'VE BEEN FORCED TO LIVE WITH.

WHY ARE YOU SO EAGER TO BETRAY THEM?

BECAUSE I LOOK OUT FOR *NUMBER ONE!* I DIDN'T CREATE ALIENATION. IT'S BEEN AROUND FOREVER, SINCE RELIGION STARTED IT. WHY SHOULD I FIGHT IT?

YOU HYPOCRITICAL COWARD. I HOPE YOU'RE PROUD OF YOURSELF.

WELL, I'M NOT GOING ANYPLACE AND NEITHER ARE **THEY**. SO, IF YOU CAN'T ABIDE BY OUR RULES THEN MAYBE IT'S TIME TO MOVE ON.

NOT BLOODY LIKELY.

BLAM

I LIVED HERE LONG BEFORE YOU SHOWED UP, HERO. THIS IS *MY* TURF-- ME ALONG WITH MY FRIENDS. BUT SINCE YOU CAME BY WE'VE BEEN HIDING 'CAUSE OF ALL THE *ATTENTION* YOU'VE BROUGHT ON THE PLACE.

COPS. THE MAFIA. SWAT TEAMS. SUPER FREAKS. THEY BEEN NOSING AROUND WHERE THEY AIN'T SUPPOSED TO.

THEY FORCED US TO HIDE IN THE SHADOWS LIKE A BUNCH OF WHIPPED DOGS.

BECAUSE OF YOU!

WELL, NO MORE.

BLAM

BAM

BAM

CHRIST! WHAT KIND'A FRIGGIN' MUTATION BLEEDS GREEN?!

WE ALWAYS KNEW YOU WERE SOME KINDA ABORTION. LIKE A VAMPIRE OR SOME-THING.

YOU'RE A DEAD MAN, JOHNNY.

AS SPAWN HISSES HIS THREAT HE CAN'T STOP WONDERING WHY HIS COSTUME ISN'T DEFENDING HIM AGAINST THIS ASSAULT.

YOU'VE GOT THAT BACKWARDS, PUNKASS. RIGHT, BOYS?

BAM BAM

BAM BAM BAM

THE SPRAY OF BULLETS SHREDS SYMBIOTE AND NECROFLESH IN TURN, SLAMMING THE HELLSPAWN BACK WITH THE FORCE OF AN ELEPHANT'S REAR KICK--

--TOPPLING THE QUARTER-TON TARGET LIKE A SMALL REDWOOD UNDER THE LOGGER'S AX.

THROUGH PUNCTURED LARYNX THE DOWNED CREATURE GASPS FOR AIR, CONVULSING WITH EACH DESPERATE BREATH--

--STILL BARELY COMPREHENDING THAT HIS OUTER SHELL, HIS SELF-AWARE SOURCE OF PROTECTION, HAS SOMEHOW BEEN 'SHUT DOWN'.

HOW'S IT FEEL TO BE ON THE RECEIVING END FOR A CHANGE?

SUCKS, DON'T IT?

GO SCREW YOURSELF.

THAT'S IT. KEEP UP THE ACT. SHOW US HOW ***BRAVE*** YOU ARE. MAKE LIKE THIS IS JUST SOME GODDAMN JOKE.

WELL, HERE'S ONE: *"WHAT'S THE LAST THING THAT GOES THROUGH A FLY'S MIND WHEN HE HITS A WINDSHIELD?*

"IT'S HIS ASS." HEE HEE!

TIME TO SAY YOUR PRAYERS. GOODNIGHT, SPOOK.

BLAM

68

DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN

Capullo '97

D

McFarlane CW

IT HAD STARTED OUT AS AN ACT OF INTIMIDATION

IF HE'D JUST LEFT WELL ENOUGH ALONE, THE HOMELESS VAGRANT WOULD NOT HAVE DRAWN SPAWN'S ATTENTION. THE WILD, ANGRY RANTS WEREN'T MUCH OUT OF THE ORDINARY... BUT THEY CONCLUDED WITH A CALLOUS ACT OF DESTRUCTION, WHICH FIRED OUR HERO'S ANGER.

"HE" WAS GENERALLY KNOWN AS "JOHN". HIS STYLE AND PRESENCE BLURRED HIM EASILY IN WITH A HUNDRED OTHERS IN SIMILAR STRAITS. THEY ARE THE HOMELESS, SCUTTLED INTO THE HEART OF **RAT CITY**, A MAZE OF MANHATTAN ALLEYWAYS LITTERED WITH SHATTERED SOULS.

WITHOUT THOUGHT OR APOLOGY HE HAD BROKEN A SPECIAL TRINKET CARRIED BY SPAWN'S COMPADRE, BOBBY.

THAT LED TO JOHN BEING FOLLOWED...

... AND TO A SITUATION THAT CULMINATED IN THE EXPLOSIVE SPRAY OF SPAWN'S BRAINS ACROSS THE ALLEYS.

IN STUNNED SILENCE, HELL'S NEW WARRIOR REELED AS HIT AFTER HIT OF GUNFIRE TORE THROUGH HIM. HIS COSTUME OFFERED NOT THE SLIGHTEST ACT OF PROTECTION.

THAT HAD NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE.

BLAM BLAM BLAM

ACROSS TOWN, ANOTHER VICTIM IS IN NEED.

TWO POLICE OFFICERS HAVE BEEN MET BY PRIVATE DETECTIVES SAM BURKE AND TWITCH WILLIAMS. THE LATTER PAIR HAD BEEN TIPPED OFF THAT A CASE OF THEIRS HAD QUITE POSSIBLY TAKEN A DEADLY TWIST.

BAM BAM BAM

JESUS.

I TOLD YOU YOU WEREN'T GOING TO LIKE THIS, SAM.

UNBELIEVABLE. YOU WANT ME TO GO CALL FOR BACK-UP...?

IT'S OKAY. DISPATCH WOULDN'T TAKE YOUR CALL ANY-WAY, SINCE YOU'VE LEFT THE FORCE AND ALL.

YEAH, THAT'S RIGHT. OLD HABITS, I GUESS.

SO, TWITCH, WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THIS MESS ANYWAYS?

THE OBVIOUS, SIR. MR. BYRD HAS BEEN PERMANENTLY RELIEVED OF THE BACK OF HIS HEAD DUE TO THE FORCED ENTRY, FRONTALLY, OF A BULLET. AND, BY THE SIZE OF THE INJURY I'D SAY THE BULLET HAD BEEN FILED DOWN SO AS TO MUSHROOM OUT THE REAR ON IMPACT.

I'LL REPORT TO THE PRECINCT. GET THEM TO SEND THE MEAT WAGON AND A FOREN-SICS TEAM.

THANKS, JIMMY.

I'LL JUST SNAP A FEW MORE PHOTOS FOR OUR PERSONAL FILES, IF YOU DON'T MIND.

GO AHEAD. IT'S NOT LIKE THIS ISN'T GOING TO BE A LONG NIGHT. JUST DO ME A FAVOR, WEAR GLOVES IF YOU WANNA TOUCH ANYTHING. I'M GOING TO LOOK AROUND.

SURE.

I DON'T LIKE WHAT I'M SEEING, SIR.

I'M WITH YA.

THERE'S NO SIGN OF A STRUGGLE. AND, GIVEN THAT HE'S IN HIS ROBE AND HIS FRONT DOOR WAS LOCKED, IT MEANS...

...THAT DINGBAT REALLY *WAS* CRAZY.

SHE SAID THAT SHE WAS BEING HAUNTED, BUT NEVER MENTIONED HER HUSBAND AS THE GUY. SEEING HOW HE'S BEEN OUT OF THE COUNTRY FOR THE PAST TWO MONTHS, I THINK IT'S SAFE TO ASSUME HE'S NOT THE GHOST.

CRIPES! AND TO SEE HER BACK THEN. SHE LOOKS SO FRIGGIN' NORMAL.

WHAT A WASTE.

BUT THEN, AREN'T THEY ALL.

ACTUALLY, SIR, IT WASN'T GHOSTS SHE WAS AFRAID OF... IT WAS *ALIENS*. MAYBE WE SHOULD HAVE TAKEN MORE HEED OF HER RAMBLINGS, RATHER THAN JUST HUMORING HER.

A TOUCH OF PARANOIA CAN PROGRESS INTO A STATE OF DELUSION.

SAM! TWITCH! THERE'S NOISE COMING FROM THE BEDROOM BACK THERE. YOU WANT A PIECE OF THIS? WE MIGHT NEED HELP.

I DON'T EXPECT ANY PROBLEMS. THE FRONT DOOR'S LOCKED, IT HAS TO BE HER.

HOW CAN YOU BE SURE SHE'S NOT ARMED?

SHE WILL BE.

BUT THERE'S NO REASON FOR HER TO USE IT AGAIN.

SHE'S BEEN CLEANSED.

CHRIST. I DON'T NEED THIS RIGHT NOW.

SSSSHHHH....

PLEASE -- I DON'T WANT TO MISS THIS PART.

FOR THE NEXT FEW MINUTES, EVERYONE STANDS FROZEN AS THE WIFE OF THE MURDER VICTIM WATCHES, ENTHRALLED, THE ENDING OF HER SHOW.

WASN'T THAT BEAUTIFUL.

EXCUSE US, MRS. BYRD, BUT WE NEED TO TALK TO YOU RIGHT NOW.

SURE, SWEETHEART. LET ME JUST CHECK OUT WHAT'S COMING ON NEXT WEEK.

E S

DO YOU KNOW YOUR HUSBAND'S DEAD?

YEAH! DO YOU KNOW THEY'RE MAKING A MOVIE OF THIS SHOW.

Um... I'D HEARD SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

WELL, IT'S TRUE. PRETTY SOON THE WORLD WILL KNOW. THEY'LL BELIEVE..... CLOSE ENCOUNTERS. ALIENS. INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS. CONTACT. THEY'RE ALL TRUE... EVEN MARS ATTACKS, IN A COUPLE OF SCENES...

THE GOVERNMENT CAN'T KEEP HIDING IT. MY HUBBY, HE DIDN'T BELIEVE. SO THEY GOT HIM. THE GREYS, I MEAN.

WITH THE ARRIVAL OF THE POLICE AND MEDICAL TEAMS, A QUICK BUT ENLIGHTENING INTERROGATION TAKES PLACE. EVERYONE IS LED TO THE SAME CONCLUSION, WITH ONLY ONE QUESTION OPEN TO ARGUMENT.

THAT WAS *THE* MOST BIZARRE CONVERSATION I'VE EVER HEARD.

SO? YOU THINK SHE'S INSANE?

DON'T YOU?

I'M NOT SURE, SIR. I'VE SEEN THIS BEFORE. A JILTED LOVER PURSUADING OTHERS TO BELIEVE IN HER PSYCHOSIS AS A MEANS TO AN INSANITY PLEA. THE JUDGE GIVES A REDUCED SENTENCE AT SOME ADULT INSTITUTION, MINIMUM SECURITY. WITH GOOD BEHAVIOR, THEY'RE BACK ON THE STREET IN TWO OR THREE YEARS.

AND SO THEN, SINCE SHE WAS NEVER IN ANY WAY HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE MURDER IN THE FIRST PLACE, THERE'S NOTHING TO PREVENT HER ACQUIRING HER HUSBAND'S ESTATE--OR ANY COLLECTABLE INSURANCE POLICIES.

EXACTLY RIGHT, SIR. AND GIVEN THAT SHE CAN SERVE US BOTH UP AS WITNESSES TO HER DELUSIONS, THE TRAP, IF NEED BE, IS PERFECTLY SET.

ON THE OTHER HAND, THE HAG COULD JUST BE A FRIGGIN' LOONEY!

WE'VE BOTH SEEN THE COLD CALCULATIONS OF A WOMAN SCORNED. SO, I BELIEVE SHE'S JUST INSANE. I NEED TO SCRUTINIZE THE LATE MR. BYRD'S BUSINESS RECORDS TO SEE IF THERE ARE ANY ADDITIONAL MOTIVES LURKING.

YOU HAVE ANY OTHER IMPRESSIONS?

YEAH!!

LIKE, HOW THIS WHOLE THING *SUCKS!* DO YOU REALIZE THAT SHE'S OUR BIGGEST ACCOUNT?* WE CAN'T AFFORD FOR HER TO BE THE MURDERER!

MEANING...?

*SEE LAST ISSUE--Tom.

I... FORGOT... TO BILL HER THE PAST TWO MONTHS. SO, WE'RE GOING TO GET STIFFED FOR A *BIG* CHUNK OF CHANGE.

BEFORE TWITCH CAN START HIS ASSAULT ON SAM'S LAX BOOKKEEPING, THE COLD NAUGAHYDE IN THE SHADOWED REAR OF THE CAR SQUEAKS.

COG!

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING HERE?!

HE NEEDS YOUR HELP.

WHO DOES?!

SPAWN.

HE'S VENTURED INTO A SECTION OF ALLEYWAY THAT IS CONTROLLED BY A POWER FAR GREATER THAN HIS. THERE, HE IS WEAK. VULNERABLE. AND NOW HIS IGNORANCE HAS BETRAYED HIM.

YOU NEED TO GO THERE NOW.

WHAT IS IT?

MR. BYRD'S COMPLETE FILES.

WHAT?! HOW COULD YOU HAVE...

IT DOESN'T MATTER. WHAT *DOES* IS WHETHER YOU CAN ARRIVE IN TIME TO SAVE YOUR NEW MASTER.

AND JUST WHO WOULD THAT BE?

"SPAWN, OF COURSE. AS I'VE SAID, HE CHOSE YOU TWO FOR A *REASON*."

SKCCHHH

nNH

GNH

HFF

GG

WHAT'S THIS GUY *MADE* OF--?!

NECROFLESH.

NEARLY A QUARTER-TON OF IT. USED TO GIVE FORM TO THE REANIMATED SOULS HELL HAS HANDPICKED FOR ITS ELITE ARMY. ITS UNHOLY ENERGY SIGNALS HEAVEN'S AGENTS THAT A NETHERWORLDLY WARRIOR EXISTS AMONG MEN.

HELL'S REPRESENTATIVES CANNOT BE LEFT UNESCORTED AS THEY WALK THE EARTH...

...HEAVEN MUST ALSO BE CONSTANTLY ON HAND WITH POWER ENOUGH TO VOID ANY DERIVED FROM THE FIERY PIT BELOW.

ALL OF THIS IS COMPLETELY LOST ON HUMANS AS WE TRICK OURSELVES INTO BELIEVING THAT **OUR** ACTIONS ARE THE ONES THAT TURN THE TIDE.

IF MAN IS CAPABLE OF ONE GREAT CONSTANT, IT'S HIS IGNORANCE OF THINGS BEYOND THIS LIFETIME.

THAT WAS FAIRLY EASY.

I WAS ALMOST BEGINNING TO THINK HE REALLY WAS A GHOST, INSTEAD OF SOME PUNKASS.

THOUGH I STILL CAN'T FIGURE OUT WHAT THIS GREEN GOO IS.

BUT!...

I'D BETTER BAG SOME OF THIS UP TO SHOW THE BOSS. HE MIGHT WANT TO SEE WHAT THIS LOSER'S HEAD ***USED TO*** LOOK LIKE.

ELSEWHERE...

puff puff

BOBBY! GUYS!

I NEED YOU! JOHN LEEKLEY, HIM AND A COUPLE OF OTHERS puff JUST TORCHED SPAWN!

WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT, ERIC?!

puff Gulp!

...AFTER SPAWN LEFT US HE WENT LOOKING FOR JOHN. I GUESS HE WANTED TO FINISH THEIR DEBATE* OR SOMETHING, BUT NEXT THING I KNEW JOHNNY AND HIS BOYS UNLOADED ON SPAWN. HE NEVER puff STOOD A CHANCE.

YA HEAR WHAT I'M TELLING YA!! HE'S DEAD!

*LAST ISSUE-- Tom.

I WAS JUST FOLLOWING A BIT BEHIND, JUST... YOU KNOW, WANTING TO HANG AROUND.

THEY GOT HIM. I SWEAR, HE NEVER EVEN FLINCHED A MUSCLE. LIKE HE WAS STUNNED OR SOMETHING.

THEN THEY BLEW HIS HEAD CLEAN OFF!

GOD DAMN IT. I'LL KILL 'EM. ALL OF THEM. WHERE ARE THEY NOW?!

I DUNNO. THEY WERE DRAGGING HIM DOWN NEAR 'HEROIN HIDEOUT'!

C'MON GUYS. LET'S GO SHOW THEM TRAITORS WHO THIS ALLEY REALLY BELONGS TO.

BE CAREFUL. THEY'VE GOT GUNS.

A FEW MOMENTS LATER, A SHADOW FALLS OVER THE LONE STRAGGLER.

YEAH, WELL, SCREW 'EM! I'LL GATHER AN ARMY SO BIG THEY'LL RUN OUT OF BULLETS TRYING TO SHOOT US ALL.

?

JEEZ-US! TONY. YOU SCARED THE *CRAP* OUTTA ME!

DID I?

WE HEARD WHAT YOU WERE SAYING TO THE OTHERS.

YEAH! LEEKLEY POPPED SPAWN. SPLATTERED HIS BRAINS ALL OVER.

YOU GUYS GOING TO CATCH UP TO BOBBY?

IN A MINUTE. WE HAVE TO FINISH A LITTLE BUSINESS WITH YOU FIRST.

P-PARDON...?

SEE, WE DON'T LIKE PEOPLE WHO GO WHERE THEY AIN'T INVITED. THEY MIGHT SEE SOMETHING THEY'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO.

AND IF WHAT YOU SAY ABOUT SPAWN IS *TRUE*, THEN THE ALLEYS HAVE JUST BECOME *WIDE OPEN*.

IT WILL BE FIVE DAYS BEFORE ANYONE WILL FIND ERIC'S SHATTERED, DECOMPOSING BODY.

A FEW BLOCKS AWAY, MOMENTUM IS BUILDING AND STRATEGIES FORMULATING WHICH MAY WELL IGNITE THE MAJORITY OF THOSE SHELTERED IN NEW YORK'S HIDDEN DENS...

...FOR IN THE MONTHS SINCE SPAWN'S FIRST APPEARANCE, **STRONG** OPINIONS HAVE BEEN FORMED OVER WHETHER OR NOT HE SHOULD EVER HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO MOVE IN.

THEN WE'RE SET. ONCE WE HITCH UP WITH VICTOR'S AND SAMUEL'S CREWS WE'LL GO SEE WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TONIGHT.

LET'S GO.

C'MON, BOOTSY.

NO.

I CAN'T THIS ISN'T MY FIGHT.

SO THAT'S IT?!!

SPAWN'S BEEN COVERING OUR ASS, PROTECTING US FROM ALL THE CRAP THAT COMES OUR WAY--AND THE *FIRST* TIME HE NEEDS *OUR* HELP, *YOU* WANT TO TURN *TAIL!!*

YOU COULD GET HURT.

MAYBE! BUT VICTOR'S GROUP IS BRINGING GUNS, TOO. THEY WANT A WAR, WE'LL *GIVE* THEM ONE.

I'M NOT GOING.

THEN YOU'RE NO FRIEND OF MINE. I GOT NOTHING IN COMMON WITH *COWARDS.*

AT THE BOWERY'S OTHER END, THE 'ENEMY' CAMP HAS YET TO PREPARE ITSELF.

PROOF!

I KNEW YOU'D WANT THIS. YOU'RE ALWAYS SO DAMN CYNICAL. HERE!

BEANS

I HAVE MY REASONS.

WHATEVER. ALL I KNOW IS THAT EVERYONE'S BEEN SO FRIGGIN' AFRAID OF SPAWN, BUILDING HIM INTO SOMETHING HE AIN'T, THAT WE'VE BEEN PRISONERS OF THESE ALLEYS.

WELL, THAT'S OVER NOW.

SO, WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THAT STUFF ANYWAYS?

I'M NOT QUITE SURE...

...BUT GIVEN WHAT I'VE SEEN HIM DO, AND WHAT THE RUMORS SAY HE'S DONE, IT'S OBVIOUS THAT HE WASN'T HUMAN.

I COULD SMELL HIS STINK THE FIRST TIME WE MET.

THEN I GUESS THAT MAKES WHAT I DID EVEN *BETTER*, unh?

WHERE IS HE NOW, JOHNNY?

OHH!... ME AND THE BOYS STUCK HIM A FEW BLOCKS FROM HERE. KINDA LIKE A SCARECROW. I SWEAR THE BUGGER WEIGHS A TON.

TOOK ALL OF US TO DRAG HIS SORRY ASS TO WHERE WE HAD IN MIND. WE WANTED TO MAKE A STATEMENT.

SHK

EEEEEGH!

YOU MALIGNANT INSECT. I'M THE KING HERE. THE ONE WHO GIVES THE ORDERS. YOUR PURPOSE IS TO FOLLOW-- TO **OBEY!**

TAKE A GOOD HARD LOOK, GENTLEMEN. YOUR FRIEND IS BLEEDING TO DEATH. SEE, WE DON'T TOLERATE INSUBORDINATION.

OUR RULES... MY RULES... ARE TO BE FOLLOWED.

SPAWN WAS MINE! IF THAT WASN'T ABUNDENTLY CLEAR BEFORE, THEN IT IS NOW. ARE WE AGREED?

I THOUGHT SO.

SO LET ME SPELL OUT EXACTLY WHAT HAS TRANSPIRED IN THE PAST FEW HOURS...

WHEN YOU SHOT SPAWN, IT WASN'T DONE IN COMPLETE ISOLATION. THE WALLS IN THIS GODFORSAKEN PLACE HAVE EYES. YOU SHOULD KNOW **THAT!!** NOTHING THAT MATTERS GOES UNNOTICED. ESPECIALLY NOT THE SLAYING OF THOSE MAGGOTS' LEADER.

BOTH SIDES ALREADY KNOW WHAT YOU'VE DONE.

BECAUSE OF THAT, WE MUST PREPARE OURSELVES. THOSE THAT NOW TURN ON US ARE BLINDED BY THEIR OWN EMOTIONS. THEY'RE CAPABLE OF ANYTHING. AND, THEIR LOYALTY IS AS DEEP AS OUR OWN. ALREADY, THEY'VE BEGUN THEIR ASSAULT.

WELL, LET THEM COME!

BECAUSE NOW IS THE TIME WE **SLAUGHTER** THEM FOR GOOD!

I'VE ALREADY SENT WORD. SOON THEIR 200 WILL BE SURROUNDED BY OUR **2,000.**

IT'LL BE A BLOOD-BATH. THEY WON'T ESCAPE.

"YOU SEE, THEY LACK THE ONE THING THEY NEED MOST... A LEADER.

"AND, ONCE YOU REMOVE THE HEAD FROM ANY GROUP, THE BODY DIES SOON AFTER."

TO BE CONTINUED.

69

DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN®

Capullo
Mcfarlane C.W.

2:21 A.M.

A SEARCH HAS BEGUN... A SEARCH TO FIND A BEING THAT MOST DON'T BELIEVE EVEN **EXISTS.**

PRODDED BY COGLIOSTRO'S INSISTENCE THAT SPAWN IS IN DIRE NEED OF HELP, DETECTIVES SAM BURKE AND TWITCH WILLIAMS FORGE DEEPER INTO THE INFRA-STRUCTURE OF MANHATTAN'S BACK ALLEYWAYS...

...SLOWLY SWALLOWED BY THE BLACK, HUNGRY MAW OF THE ICY SHADOWS.

OKAY, TWITCH, LET'S DO IT.

I'VE GOT YOUR BACK, SIR.

I SWEAR I GET THE CREEPS EVERY TIME WE GO IN *THERE.*

JUSTIFIABLY SO. STILL, IT *IS* THE PLACE COGLIOSTRO SAID WE'D FIND HIM.

WE'D BETTER! 'CAUSE I'M GETTING SICK AND TIRED OF CHASING GHOSTS.

ESPECIALLY IN RAT CITY.

THEN WE'D BETTER STAY SHARP, SIR, BECAUSE WE'RE ABOUT TO ENTER HELL.

A PLACE NO ONE CAN DEFEND OR JUSTIFY. A HAVEN FOR ANYONE WANTING TO DISAPPEAR FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH.

INDEED... FOR, IN HUNTING DOWN A CREATURE KNOWN ONLY TO A FEW, THEY WILL TRAVERSE A LABYRINTH OF DECAYED PASSAGES STRETCHING DEEP INTO THE BOWELS OF LOWER MANHATTAN.

RAT CITY. *IT'S A PLACE THAT EXISTS ONLY IN THE CONFLICTED INTERESTS OF A SELECT CLIENTELE. POLICE. BUREAUCRATS. MURDERERS. DRUG ADDICTS.*

THE PUBLIC, AS A WHOLE, KNOWS NOTHING ABOUT THE PLACE. THAT'S THE WAY LOCAL POLITICIANS HAVE KEPT IT FOR THE PAST THREE DECADES.

FOR, WHATEVER FEARS THE CITIZENRY MAY HAVE ABOUT BEING ASSAULTED BY THOSE THEY **CAN** SEE...

...THEY **PALE** IN COMPARISON TO FEARS OF THOSE THEY **CAN'T.** EVEN THE HOMELESS AND OUTCAST ARE SCARED TO ENTER THIS DOMAIN. FOR THE DEEPER YOU ENTER...

...THE FURTHER YOU PENETRATE ITS SECLUDED DARKNESS...

...THE MORE HORRIFIC BECOME THE SECRETS IT IS TRYING TO HIDE.

Sweet mercy.

JESUS.

FOR A MOMENT, BOTH DETECTIVES JUST QUIETLY TAKE IN WHAT THEY SEE. COGLIOSTRO HAD WARNED THEM THEY WERE ABOUT TO ENTER SOME KIND OF BIZARRE WAR -- ONE THAT WOULD EXTEND BEYOND THE PARAMETERS OF A TURF WAR. THE REALITY OF THE SITUATION TAKES SOME GETTING USED TO.

CRUCIFIED AND **HEADLESS,** THE LIMP REMAINS OF SPAWN SERVE **NOTICE**: IT'S **OPEN SEASON** FOR ALL ON THE SIDE OF THIS UNSEEN ENEMY.

BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT STOPS SAM AND HIS PARTNER DEAD IN THEIR TRACKS.

WHAT CHILLS THEM IS THAT, IN PAST ENCOUNTERS, BOTH MEN HAD BEEN WITNESS TO SPAWN'S INCREDIBLE STRENGTH AND RECUPERATIVE POWERS. HE'D SEEMED ALMOST INVULNERABLE. THE THOUGHT THAT THERE IS SOMETHING LOOSE THAT CAN MUTILATE SUCH A BEING TO THIS DEGREE... **THAT** SCARES THE DETECTIVES.

GOD ONLY KNOWS WHAT KIND OF UNHOLY POWER IS NOW RUNNING UNCHECKED.

WHILE ELSEWHERE ON THE FRINGE OF TERRITORY THAT IS TWO LEVELS REMOVED FROM THE HEART OF 'RAT CITY', A CONFRONTATION OF ANOTHER SORT IS ABOUT TO BE JOINED.

GARF IS A PINKHEAD

COOL DIZ

RAMOS

IT INVOLVES REPRESENTATIVES OF TWO ETERNAL CLANS:

HEAVEN AND HELL.

IRONIC, ISN'T IT?

THAT WE'VE GOT A WAR RIGHT UNDER OUR NOSES. AND NEITHER ONE OF US IS CAPABLE OF DOING ANYTHING ABOUT IT. MAKES ME WONDER WHO IS ***REALLY*** IN CONTROL OF HUMAN DESTINY.

NEITHER OF OUR MASTERS SEEMS TO BE GAINING ANYTHING OUT OF THIS SKIRMISH.

WHAT ARE YOU BLUBBERING ABOUT, OLD MAN?

PLEASE. SPARE ME YOUR INNOCENT ACT. I'VE KNOWN FOR A LONG TIME OF YOUR PRESENCE HERE ON EARTH. ***BOOTSY?*** ISN'T THAT THE NAME YOU GO BY NOW? WELL, I APPLAUD YOUR SUCCESS IN FITTING IN SO EFFORTLESSLY WITH THE HUMANS... BUT YOU ***HAD*** TO KNOW I'D BE AWARE OF YOUR SURVEILLANCE DUTY.

HEAVEN CAN'T BE ***THAT*** FOOLISH, ***CAN*** IT?

IT'S ***NOT.*** BUT I MUST STILL ADHERE TO MY ORDERS.

TO WATCH. BUT NOT INTERFERE.

THAT'S RIGHT. UNLIKE HELL, HEAVEN BELIEVES IN ***DISCRETION***. THERE ISN'T A THING YOUR SIDE DOES THAT WE AREN'T AWARE OF... INCLUDING YOUR EFFORTS TO TEACH THE NEW HELLSPAWN HOW TO ***REVERSE*** HIS PRE-ORDAINED FATE.

HIS JUDGMENT DAY HAS ALREADY ***PASSED***. IT'S THOSE THAT HAVEN'T DIED THAT GOD'S INTERESTED IN.

THE PATHS THEY MAY CHOOSE TO TRAVEL HAVE YET TO BE FINALLY DECIDED.

AND SO THE WAY ***YOU*** HELP IS TO DO ***NOTHING*** WHILE YOUR FRIENDS ARE WILLING TO ***DIE*** TRYING TO DEFEND HELL'S NEW CREATION.

NO ***WONDER*** EVIL RUNS SO RAMPANT.

LOOK! MY JOB IS TO ***REPORT. NOT*** REACT!! ***FREE WILL MUST STILL BE*** THE MANDATE OF ***ALL*** MANKIND. OUR INVOLVEMENT ***MUST*** BE THROUGH INTERVENTION THAT THEY CAN ATTRIBUTE TO ***UNSEEN FORCES***. THEY CALL THEM ***MIRACLES!!*** I ***BELIEVE*** WE'VE DONE OUR FAIR ***SHARE*** OF THOSE!

WHAT'S ***YOUR*** SIDE DONE?

I DIDN'T KNOW HEAVEN WAS KEEPING SCORE. OR THAT IT CAN SO EASILY JUSTIFY ITS ACTIONS WITH A LOGIC THAT SUITS ONLY ITSELF.

I'M SORRY. I WAS HOPING I COULD COUNT ON IT BEING ***MORE*** THAN THAT.

GOOD NIGHT.

-; UNG <-
HUFF!
GNNH
I... THINK IT'S COMING LOOSE.
JUST ANOTHER SECOND... UNNGF!
WILL YOU HURRY UP!
POK
OUCH.
OUCH. OUCH. OUCH.
YOU OKAY?
PERFECT.
GOOD.
I TRIED TO KEEP MY FOOTING BUT IT FELT LIKE I GOT HIT BY A TON OF BRICKS. JHAT GREEN JELL-O HE'S MADE OF OBVIOUSLY AIN'T NORMAL... WHICH SEEMS TO BE PAR FOR THE COURSE.
C'MON, GIVE ME A HAND.
LIKE SO MANY BE-FORE THEM, THEY'D ASSUMED THAT BECAUSE SPAWN LOOKED LIKE A MAN, HE MUST **BE** ONE.
ONE ENDOWED WITH GREAT POWERS, BUT STILL A MAN.
GRUNT
UMPP

THE REALITY IS THAT THE FORMER ARMY Lt. COLONEL AL SIMMONS IS CONSTRUCTED OF A SUBSTANCE UNKNOWN TO MAN, WITH PROPERTIES NOT IN COMPLIANCE WITH STANDARD SCIENCE.

THE RESULT: SPAWN... HIS **NECROFLESH BODY**... WEIGHS OVER 400 POUNDS.

OOPS!

FOR A PAIR OF LESS THAN STUD-LIKE DETECTIVES, THIS BECOMES PROBLEMATIC.

CRIPES! THAT WAS MY FAULT! THAT WAS MY FAULT! I TAKE THE BLAME-- unh... YOU OKAY UNDER THERE, BUDDY?

ouch. ouch. ouch. ouch.

PERFECT.

I SWEAR ON MY MOTHER'S GRAVE I'M GONNA KILL THAT COGLIOSTRO NEXT TIME I SEE HIM.

THAT OLD FART MUST THINK THIS IS ALL SOME HILARIOUS JOKE. *grunt* **THERE!** I THINK YOU CAN GET OUT NOW.

BURDENED WITH THE DEAD WEIGHT OF SPAWN'S CARCASS, SAM AND TWITCH MAKE PAINFULLY HALTING HEADWAY AS THEY EXIT THE MAZE OF ALLEYS.

THAT DELAY WILL COST THE LIVES OF MANY THIS NIGHT.

HEY YOU! DROP AL RIGHT NOW!

THEN BACK AWAY SLOWLY.

JEEZ! BOBBY, LOOK! IT'S TRUE! THEY *DID* BLOW HIS HEAD OFF!

YOU PUNKS WANT TO KILL OUR KING THEN YOU'D BETTER BE PRE-PARED TO DIE! 'CAUSE YOU'VE SCREWED US FOR THE LAST TIME.

C'MON, GUYS.

CLICK

CLICK

TRY THAT ONE AGAIN, SMARTASS.

HEY! WHO'S *THERE?!*

BEFORE THE MISTAKEN IDENTITIES CAN BE SORTED OUT, BOBBY'S LEGITIMATE OPPONENTS ARRIVE.

WORD IS YOU MEAN TO TAKE WHAT BELONGS TO *US* NOW-- *RAT CITY.*

WELL, YOUR TOUGH GUY HERO AIN'T GOING TO SAVE YOU THIS TIME.

AND IN A FEW SHORT MINUTES SCARRONI AND HIS BOYS WILL BE HERE WITH THE HEAVY ARTILLERY.

OH, *YEAH...?* WELL, *WE'VE* GOT THE HORDES OF *HEROIN HIDEOUT* MARCHING THIS WAY. AND I *MEAN* THE *ENTIRE* SOUTHEAST SECTION.

LOOKS LIKE WE'VE GOT OURSELVES A PISSING CONTEST, TWITCH. YOU COVER THE LEFT FLANK.

YOU BROUGHT THIS ON YOURSELVES, YOU AND YOUR GODDAMN PASSIVE BUNCH. *WE* DIDN'T NEED SPAWN. YOU HEAR?! HE WAS A GODDAMN FREAK... ALWAYS BROUGHT THE LAW INTO *OUR* ALLEYS.

THIS IS *OUR* HOME, NOT HIS. BUT YOU MADE HIM INTO SOMETHING HE *WASN'T*... A *HERO!*

WELL, HE DID NOTHING BUT *CRAP* ON US. *ALL* OF US. INCLUDING *YOU.*

HOW DARE YOU?!! JUST BE-CAUSE YOU COULDN'T PEDDLE YOUR WHORES AND DRUGS LIKE YOU DID BEFORE DIDN'T MAKE HIM YOUR ENEMY.

YOU COULD'VE JUST MOVED ON-- HE DIDN'T CARE ABOUT WHAT YOU DID-- HE JUST DIDN'T WANT IT GOING ON AROUND HIM.

THE CHARGE BEGINS.

FREEZE!! *ALL* OF YOU!

LOOK, I DON'T KNOW WHO THE HELL YOU GUYS ARE--

-- BUT THIS AIN'T YOUR FIGHT SO GET THE HELL OUTTA HERE BEFORE YOU GET PERMANENTLY HURT.

SEEMS TO ME WE'VE GOT OURSELVES A LITTLE MISUNDER-STANDING HERE. SO LET ME SEE IF I CAN'T SET A COUPLE THINGS *STRAIGHT.*

FIRST: YOU SCUMBAGS ARE NOTHING BUT A BUNCH OF LOSER, THIEVING, USELESS, PIECES OF SHIT.

SECOND: THIS GUY YOU'RE ALL FIGHTING OVER, SPAWN. HE'S WANTED FOR QUESTIONING IN OVER A DOZEN INCI-DENTS IN THESE PARTS. SO IF HE'S YOUR LEADER THEN IT JUST TELLS ME WHAT KINDS OF MORONS YOU ARE.

SUCK ME, FAT BOY! YOU HAVE *NO IDEA--*

SHUT UP!!

THIRD: IF YOU GUYS WANT, I WILL MAKE *ALL* YOUR LIVES A CONSTANT NIGHTMARE BY BRINGING THE ENTIRE N.Y.P.D. IN HERE *EVERY NIGHT.*

YOU COPS CAN'T POSSIBLY HASSLE US MORE THAN YOU ALREADY DO.

TWITCH? THINK YOU CAN HELP THESE GUYS COMPREHEND ANY BETTER?

WHY, YES, SIR.

FOUR!... WE'VE GOT *BIG* GUNS. YOU *DON'T.*

VOTE NIXON

WE AIN'T AFRAID OF YOU.

THEN, I GUESS, WE'RE EVEN.

WHATCHA GOING TO DO? KILL ALL OF US? WE'VE GOT NOTHING, REMEMBER. WE'RE *LOSERS* -- WHICH MEANS DYING WOULD BE A BLESSING.

I'M WARNING YOU.

LET'S GET 'EM!

BLAM

TCK

HA!

HA-HA-HA-YESSS! YOU FRIGGIN' WUSS. I KNEW YOU COPS DIDN'T HAVE ANY GUTS.

BETTER SAY YOUR PRAYERS FAST.

BEFORE WE GET INTO ANY OF THAT, I SUGGEST YOU ALL LOOK BEHIND YOU.

THE NEXT ONE OF YOU TO MOVE A MUSCLE GETS A REPEAT PERFORM-ANCE.

NOW GET OVER THERE AGAINST THE WALL AND PUT YOUR HANDS AGAINST IT. YOU SEARCH THEM, SIR.

THIS AIN'T OVER, COP! YOU'LL SEE. THERE'S AN ARMY MARCHING THIS WAY. YOU CAN'T STOP ANY OF THIS.

VOTE NIXON

THIS IS OUR HOME. NONE OF THIS CONCERNS YOU. AND DON'T PRETEND YOU EVEN CARE ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS TO US.

HE IS QUITE RIGHT.

BECAUSE AS MUCH AS YOU OFFICERS WANT TO UPHOLD THE LAW, THE FACT IS YOU DON'T GIVE A RAT'S ASS ABOUT ANY OF THIS. I'D EVEN WAGER THAT MOST OF NEW YORK'S FINEST WOULD RATHER SEE US DEAD.

TO YOU WE'RE ALL JUST LOSERS. ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU CALLED US...?

WELL, LOOK WHO'S WINNING NOW.

SO I SUGGEST YOU DROP YOUR GUN, OR ELSE YOU'LL HAVE TWO HEADLESS BODIES TO DEAL WITH.

GO AHEAD! *DO* IT! BUT IF YOU HURT HIM, I'LL BLOW YOUR FRIGGIN' HEAD ALL OVER THIS ALLEY.

VOTE NIXON

C'MON! *CUT* HIM! YOU'RE SO UNAFRAID TO DIE THEN *PROVE* IT! WE CAN END THIS ALL PRETTY QUICK!

HA HA HA HA HA HA

I SAID *CUT HIM, TOUGH GUY!* I NEVER DID LIKE THE LITTLE TWERP! SHOW ME YOU'VE GOT A *DEATHWISH!!*

YOU HEAR ME...

...*LOSER*...?

HEE-HEE-huh-HEEE... ANOTHER MADMAN. GOOD. I DO SO LOVE THE COMPANY.

C'MON, OFFICER. LOOK INTO MY EYES. AND TELL ME WHICH OF US IS BLUFFING.

DEAD SILENCE SETS IN.

A MOMENT OF RECKONING IS AT HAND.

YET LOST SOMEHOW IN THIS STANDOFF IS THE REASON WHY ALL ARE HERE TONIGHT.

SPAWN.

INEXPLICABLY, HIS UNIFORM HAD FAILED TO PROTECT HIM... RESULTING IN A FALSE MESSAGE TO THOSE WHO FELLED HIM.

THEY THOUGHT HIM WEAK. AN EASY TARGET. AND BEFORE SPAWN HIMSELF KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING, HE'D LOST THE BATTLE.

BUT THE TRUTH IS THAT HE HAD ENTERED THE DOMAIN OF **HEAVEN**, IN WHICH GOD'S POWERS NULLIFY THE EVIL SENT FROM HELL.

YES, HEAVEN DOES EXIST WITHIN THESE ALLEYS. THE HUMAN EYE JUST CAN'T REGISTER ITS PRESENCE.

YET ONCE OUTSIDE THAT SMALL DOMAIN, **EVIL** HAS FREE REIGN ONCE AGAIN.

ALTHOUGH THEY DON'T KNOW IT, SAM AND TWITCH HAD CARRIED SPAWN BACK ACROSS THE THRESHOLD OF HEAVEN'S 'DEAD ZONE'...

...OUTSIDE... TO WHERE ALL THE **MADNESS** LIVES...

...AND OBEYS!...

...ONCE AGAIN ABLE TO MESH WORMS, MAGGOTS, FLIES AND RATS INTO THIS NOW-REANIMATED DARK SENTINEL... HELL'S NEWEST GRIM REAPER.

TO BE CONTINUED.

image

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DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN

Capullo
&
Mikey D.

THE BOARD HAS BEEN LAID OUT. THE PLAYERS POISED IN THE POSITIONS THEY DEEM MOST ADVANTAGEOUS. WILLING TO ENTER A BATTLE OVER SELF-ASSIGNED TERRITORIAL PRIVILEGES.

THESE COMBATANTS ARE, HOWEVER, REALLY REACTING TO A PRESENCE, A **GHOST** NOW BACK FROM THE GRAVE.

AMONG SOME, THERE'S A BELIEF THAT HE SHOULD **NEVER** HAVE BEEN GRANTED THE RIGHT OF LIVING WITH THEM IN SOCIETY'S SHADOWS. THAT HE'S AN **INTRUDER**. AN **ENEMY** THAT CONTINUALLY DISRUPTS THEIR AIMLESS LIVES.

OTHERS HAVE BEGUN TO **REVERE** HIM. TURNED HIM INTO SOMETHING MORE THAN HE WANTS TO BE: AN EXCUSE FOR FEELING **HOPEFUL**. THEIR PROTECTOR. THEIR **KING**.

FOR HIS PART, THIS CREATURE CALLED SPAWN ASKED TO BE NEITHER ENEMY NOR FRIEND. **SOLITUDE** WAS ALL HE CRAVED.

BUT THE SIMPLE FACT OF HIS RETURN, OF HIS NEW LIFE, CREATED A RIPPLE WHICH HAS TOUCHED MANY. SOME OF THIS EFFECT WAS THE RESULT OF HIS OWN ACTIONS, AS WITH THE DAY HE LEFT A CORPSE IN THE OFFICE OF TWO DETECTIVES. *

WITH OTHERS, IT'S BECAUSE THEY'D ALREADY CROSSED A LINE PAST WHICH MOST OF US WOULD DARE NOT GO. INTO THE BOSOM OF **MADNESS**. WHERE INSANITY IS **SOUGHT OUT. EMBRACED.**

THIS REALITY... THESE PEOPLE... NOW DEFINE SPAWN'S WORLD.

*ISSUE 5 -- Tom.

A PLACE WHERE EVEN THE STRONGEST OF MEN CAN BE STRIPPED OF ALL THEY HOLD PRECIOUS.

WHERE WHAT WAS ONCE HUMAN CAN FIND ITSELF A REANIMATED SPECTRE, WHOSE **NECROFLESH** IS NOW WOVEN TIGHTLY WITH THE PUTRID EFFECTS OF MAN'S DECAY.

WORMS. MAGGOTS. FILTH. ALL COHERE TO COMPRISE THIS HELLISH WARRIOR'S NEW SHAPE. A WALKING, FESTERING **OUTRAGE** THAT SATAN HOPES WILL ONE DAY LEAD HIS ARMY OF THE DAMNED AGAINST GOD HIMSELF.

THE CURSE THAT IS SPAWN HAS BEEN CALLED MANY THINGS THROUGH THE CENTURIES. TANGIBLE FORM ENSHROUDS THIS NAME WE NOW FEAR MOST:

THE GRIM REAPER. IT IS FAR FROM BEING A MYTH.

AND THOUGH HE'S TRIED TO FIGHT WHAT HE IS, HE WILL **NOW** RESIST IT **NO LONGER.**

INSTEAD, AS HE HAS DONE WITH ALL THE MADNESS AROUND HIM, HE WILL WELCOME IT. INJEST IT. ABSORB IT.

SIN. EVIL. WICKEDNESS. HE TAKES IT FROM THEIR AURAS AND COMBINES IT WITHIN HIS OWN, HIS CLOAK DRAWN TIGHTLY TO HIM.

THEN, SOMEHOW, HE GIVES IT **FORM**.

RETURNS IT TO THE ANGRY GROUP FROM WHICH IT WAS BORROWED.

IT HAS TAKEN BUT A SECOND FOR THIS UNHOLY METAMORPHOSIS. NOW THE FURIES BURST FORTH... THE HORROR OF **ALL HELL BREAKING LOOSE!**

THE CROWD IS SHOCKED SENSELESS. THOSE WHO'D BEEN TRAINED BY NEW YORK'S FINEST INSTINCTIVELY SEIZE THE MOMENT.

AAKH!

NOW, SIR!

JMPH!

DETECTIVE SAM BURKE SLAMS LIKE A CHARGING RHINO INTO HIS OPPONENT. SEPARATES THE MADMAN FROM HIS PARTNER.

WITH THE THREAT MOMENTARILY DIMINISHED, SAM MUST NOW GAIN THE UPPER HAND.

C'MON, FAT MAN, YOU CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT.

HE DOESN'T HAVE TO.

KRAK!

SIR, YOU OKAY?

YEAH, FINE. I THINK YOU CLOCKED HIM GOOD.

AS THEY COMPOSE THEIR WITS, THEY SURVEY THE SITUATION THEY HAD JUST LEFT BEHIND.

AS MORE AND MORE REINFORCEMENTS APPEAR, SO GROWS THE CHAOS. A MOB OF HUMANITY'S DREGS IS ENGAGED IN A FRENZIED MELEE THAT SERVES TO FEED THE BLACK CLOUD OF SHRIEKING BATS.

EACH WANTED A RESOLUTION TO THE SITUATION. NOW THEY SHALL HAVE IT.

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OTHERS FIND COURAGE IN THE MIND-ALTERING DRUGS THAT COURSE THROUGH THEIR VEINS.

WITH EVER MORE GANG MEMBERS ENTERING THE FRAY, MERE BODILY HARM STARTS GIVING WAY TO DECIDEDLY DEADLIER RESULTS.

BOTH SIDES SUFFER LOSSES.

THE ALLEYWAY IS LITTERED WITH A BATTLEFIELD'S BOUNTY. YET THE CARNAGE IS NOT SLOWED IN ANY MANNER.

IF ANYTHING, THE FRENZY SEEMS TO BE BUILDING, TAKING ON A LIFE OF ITS OWN.

FEEDING EVER MORE FULLY ON THE NIGHTMARE ACTIONS OF THOSE INVOLVED.

THE ASSAULT FLOURISHES TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT SPAWN, GOADED BY HIS OWN RISING ANGER, HAS HIS LIVING CLOAK THROW WIDE THE PASSAGE. IT CONTINUES TO VOMIT OUT THE TANGIBLE EQUIVALENT OF THIS HATRED AND EVIL.

THERE IS ALSO A SOUND... LIKE A DISTANT ECHO OF A DEVIL'S CACKLE.

EARLIER THAT SAME DAY...

TEE HEE HEE HEE HEEEE

CYAN, YOU BE CAREFUL WITH YOUR NECKLACE. THE WIND MIGHT TAKE IT AWAY.

O'TAY, MOMMA.

YOU KNOW, HONEY, I'D RATHER YOU SIT IN YOUR SEAT PROPERLY. AND NOT MESS AROUND. IT ISN'T SAFE.

AS CYAN CONCENTRATES ON WHAT HER MOTHER IS SAYING, SHE GETS DISTRACTED FROM THE GAME SHE'D BEEN PLAYING.

IT'S A FAIRLY COMMON OCCURRENCE FOR A CHILD JUST UNDER THREE YEARS OLD.

HER **REACTION**, THOUGH, ISN'T NORMAL. A BLOOD-CURDLING **SHRIEK** ELECTRIFIES THE AIR AS THE CHILD SLIDES INTO SOME PRIMORDIAL STATE--

-- ITS STARTLING INTENSITY STARTLING WANDA INTO A NEAR **ACCIDENT.**

BEFORE SHE CAN EVEN ASSESS CYAN'S TANTRUM, THE CHILD IS UPON HER LIKE A RAGING BANSHEE.

NOOO!!

MY NECKLACE MY NECKLACE I NEED MY NECKLACE!

CYAN!? WHAT ARE YOU DOING? GET BACK TO YOUR SEAT! YOU'RE HURTING ME!

STOP!! MOMMIE!! YOU HAF TO GIT MY NECKLACE!

NOW!

WANDA STRUGGLES TO KEEP THE CAR FROM VEERING OUT OF THE LANE WHILE LOOKING FOR THE FIRST CHANCE TO PULL OVER. BUT BEFORE SHE CAN...

NO! GET AWAY FROM THAT DOOR. DO YOU HEAR ME?! I WANT YOU BACK IN YOUR SEAT *RIGHT THIS INSTANT!*

WANDA PULLS OVER TO THE SIDE AS TRAFFIC BUZZES BY, HONKING ANGRILY.

CYAN TAKES THE OPPORTUNITY TO BOLT FROM THE CONFINES OF THE AUTOMOBILE.

CYAN!! STOP! COME BACK!!

CRIME

THE SMALL GIRL COVERS THE FORTY YARDS IN SECONDS. MIRACULOUSLY, THE SOOTHER AND NECKLACE HAD LANDED IN THE SHOULDER LANE, TOO -- BECAUSE IN HER STATE, CYAN WOULD SURELY HAVE RUN INTO THE PATH OF ONCOMING TRAFFIC IF THAT'S WHERE HER TOY HAD LANDED.

MOMMY, CAN WE GO HOME NOW...

I'M TIRED.

HER MOTHER WALKS THE CHILD BACK TO THE CAR, THINKING THAT THIS HAS HAPPENED,* THE SAME EXTREME, VIOLENT REACTION. SHE WONDERS, IF ONLY FOR A MOMENT, IF HER GIRL HAS SOMEHOW BEEN POSSESSED...?

*ISSUE 66 -- Tom.

THE SAME COULD BE SAID OF THE DANK, FILTH-STAINED ALLEYS WHICH HAVE NOW TURNED THOSE IT SHELTERS AGAINST ONE ANOTHER --

-- WITH AN INTENSITY THAT RESONATES DOWN EACH NARROW PASSAGEWAY, THE DIN ECHOING LOUDER UNTIL THOSE OUTSIDE BECOME AWARE.

TWO CORROBORATING PHONE CALLS FROM CONCERNED CITIZENS SOON PROMPT THE CLOSEST PATROL CAR TO THE SCENE.

POLICE

...OR AT LEAST THE **GATEWAY** TO THE SCENE.

POLICE

C'MON. LET'S GO.

THE OFFICERS ENTER THE DARK BOWERY AND ARE CONSUMED BY A DARKNESS SO THICK NEITHER IS ABLE TO SEE ANYTHING...

... AND THEN THEY FIND THEY ARE HEADED IN THE **OPPOSITE** DIRECTION... BACK OUT OF THE ALLEYS!

WHAT THE--?!

EXPERIENCE THE FUTILITY OF THE EXACT SAME RESULTS.

NOT BELIEVING WHAT JUST HAPPENED, THEY REPEAT THE EXPERIENCE OVER AND OVER.

THIS IS CRAZY! WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?

FRED, YOU'D BETTER CALL FOR BACK-UP.

IT WON'T CHANGE A THING. FOR TONIGHT SOME FORCE, BE IT HEAVEN'S OR HELL'S, HAS INTERVENED IN SUCH A MANNER THAT NO ONE FROM THE OUTSIDE SHALL INTERRUPT WHAT IS TRANSPIRING ON THE INSIDE.

THIS SCENE MUST BE PLAYED OUT.

REGARDLESS OF THE AFTERMATH OR ITS VICTIMS.

YAA!

WHEN THE POWERS ABOVE HAVE AN INTEREST IN A SITUATION, THE CELESTIAL ATTENDANTS OF THE LORD ARE NOT ALLOWED THEIR OWN MOTIVATIONS.

THOSE AGENTS ARE TO WATCH AND REPORT **ONLY**. DIRECT ACTION IS NOT CONDONED.

UNKNOWN TO THOSE AROUND HIM, BOOTSY IS AN ANGEL MANIFESTED AS HUMAN, HERE TO RECORD WHAT GOES ON IN THIS PARTICULAR PLACE. HE KNOWS HIS ORDERS, AS WELL AS THE POSSIBLE-- AND NOW LIKELY-- COST OF DISOBEDIENCE.

YOU'RE GOING TO BE OKAY, BOBBY. JUST HANG IN THERE.

BOOTSY CURSES HIS FEELINGS. AND THE FACT HE HAS BEEN ON EARTH WITH THEM FOR SO LONG.

HE FEELS BETRAYED BY HIS EMOTIONS, WHILE SPAWN HAS COMPLETELY GIVEN WAY TO HIS OWN.

ALLOWING HIS UNIFORM TO TAKE POSSESSION OF ITS HOST, SATISFYING ITS HUNGER ON THE HORRORS SWIRLING AROUND IT.

DEVOURING THE CANCEROUS SOULS OF THOSE NOW DEAD AND DAMNED TO HELL.

SNAPPING WILDLY AT THE AIR LIKE SOME CRAZED, RABID BEAST. UNTIL...

...IT STOPS DEAD IN ITS TRACKS.

CONFUSING AN ALREADY DAZED SPAWN. CAUSING HIM TO WONDER HOW HE HAS JUST BEEN NEUTRALIZED.

'THE DEAD ZONE.' HE'S JUST CROSSED OVER ITS INVISIBLE BOUNDRY AGAIN.

IT'S A PLACE WHERE HEAVEN IS IN CONTROL, BUT ONLY TO THE POINT OF SUPERSEDING HELL'S EFFORTS TO SUBVERT MANKIND.

THIS INFLUENCE EXTENDS TO SPAWN, MAKING HIM PREY ONCE AGAIN TO THOSE WHO RESENT HIS PRESENCE.

LEAVE HIM *ALONE!* Y'HEAR?! HE'S MINE! I'LL *KILL* YOU IF YOU KILL HIM!

DETECTIVE BURKE BUYS SPAWN A PRECIOUS FEW SECONDS. IN THE PROCESS, THE CRIMSON WARRIOR IS SHOVED OFF-BALANCE AND STAGGERS BACK A FEW STEPS...

...CROSSING ONCE AGAIN **OUTSIDE** THE 'DEAD ZONE'.

HIS SYMBIOTIC OUTER SHELL IS GIVEN LIFE SO QUICKLY THAT SPAWN IS HIT WITH THE EQUIVALENT OF A SEVERE DRUG-INDUCED RUSH.

FULL FORCE.

CRIPES! WHERE'D THIS WIND COME FROM?

I DON'T KNOW, BUT SOMEHOW IT SEEMS TO BE STRONGEST BETWEEN US AND THEM.

I DON'T CARE, WE HAVE TO STOP THAT *SLAUGHTER*, GODDAMMIT!

THEY CAN'T. TRY AS THEY MAY, THEY HAVE BEEN BLOCKED FROM INTERFERING BY SOME MYSTICAL GALE-FORCE WIND.

YOU HAVE TO DO SOMETHING, SPAWN. WE CAN'T GET THROUGH.

NO! I CAN'T DO IT EITHER.

WHAT'RE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT? WE'VE SEEN YOUR STRENGTH. *YOU* CAN...

I SAID **NO!!**

YOU SAW WHAT THEY DID TO ME BEFORE. THEY BLEW MY FRIGGIN' **HEAD** OFF, REMEMBER? SOMEHOW I LOSE MY POWERS THERE. AND I'M JUST NOT IN THE **MOOD** TO DIE FOR ANYONE IN THERE RIGHT NOW.

BUT I KNOW WHERE THIS PROBLEM STARTED. I MEAN TO FIX THAT.

AND IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE SPAWN MELDS WITH THE SHADOWS, DISAPPEARING FROM SIGHT.

EMERGING NOT FAR AWAY.

I SAW YOU FLEE.

WHAT'S THE MATTER? WHAT YOU'VE CAUSED **WASN'T** CRAZY ENOUGH FOR YOU?! THERE WEREN'T ENOUGH BODY PARTS...?

OR BLOOD.

OR SCREAMS.

OR INSANITY?!

HEEEEE... HA HA HA HEE HEE HEE HEE-

SO YOU'RE ALIVE, AGAIN. IT WON'T MATTER, THOUGH, 'CAUSE WHAT YOU WITNESSED TONIGHT WILL JUST REPEAT ITSELF UNTIL THESE ALLEYS ARE **RID** OF YOU.

AND YOU CAN'T CHANGE ANY OF IT. SO DON'T TRY AND INTIM'DATE. YOU DON'T SCARE ME.

DON'T I?

WELL THEN, DO YOU SCARE YOUR-SELF?

DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE?

WHAT HIDES INSIDE YOU?

HEE HEE HA HA HO HO HO HO HO

THAT'S IT! TRY LAUGHING IT AWAY. SHOW ME HOW UNAFRAID YOU ARE.

LET US FEEL IT. C'MON! DON'T YOU WANT TO FEEL?

SLOWLY, LIKE A LIVING SYRUP, THE ALLEY'S INSECTS, GRUBS AND WORMS POUR OVER THE FREAK. APPEARING MAGICALLY FROM ANY AND EVERY CRACK AND CREVICE. **DROWNING** THE SPINDLY MADMAN IN A DENSE COAT OF BLACK, SLIMY MASS. THE HARDER HE STRUGGLES THE FASTER HE'S BURIED.

EEYAH!

THEN, THE SCREAMS AND STRUGGLES SUBSIDE, LEAVING NOTHING BUT SKITTERING SHADOWS IN THEIR WAKE.

KARMA. THAT'S WHAT SWALLOWED HIM. HIS OWN EVIL. COMING BACK ON ITS MASTER. THE NETHER CREATURES TRYING TO RECLAIM THE PLACE FROM WHENCE THEY CAME.

THEY WANT BACK INSIDE HIM. INSTEAD, THEY'LL SUFFOCATE HIM IN THE ATTEMPT.

BAD KARMA. SPAWN PULLED THE AURA OUT OF FREAK. GAVE IT TANGIBLE FORM AND **SENT IT BACK.**

AND NOW THE FREAK IS LITERALLY KILLING HIMSELF.